

Blur the Edges of Memory

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by [geethr75](#)

Summary

He had been Sandu Shengshou, had built his Sect to be one of the richest and strongest after it had burned down, had raised a nephew from infancy, had squatted in the sun alongside his men, nailing planks, had carried timber, sawed wood, dug latrines, had haggled for hours with vendors while he rebuilt his home.

And he'd done it all by himself.

That man had had no pride in those days, because he couldn't afford it.

In the now, he feels a twinge of regret for the loss of Zidian, and lets it go. Because he has learned through blood and sweat and tears, and endless nights of grief that he would rather lose all that than the man who sat opposite him, worrying his teeth between his lips, the man who he never stopped loving, and whom he had hated and missed desperately for thirteen years and more.

His brother who had been forced into a dark path because he had tried to help Jiang Cheng.

Eight years after the events of canon, Jiang Cheng accidentally travels to the past, and decides to fix his relationship with his brother.

Shenanigans ensue.

As usual, I suck at summaries.

THIS FIC IS EXTREMELY JIANG CHENG FRIENDLY

Notes

This is my first work in this fandom, and since Jiang Cheng is my most favourite character, it will be centred around him. This is based mostly on the book, so the events may be different from the show. There is some minor character bashing due to the prejudices of the Pov characters.

I have to emphasise that this fic is extremely Jiang Cheng friendly, and if you don't like him, please do not read.

This is fully written, and is being edited. Updates will happen on every Friday.

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Prologue

Jiang Cheng sits at the pier, a jar of wine in his hands, and watches the sunset. Lotus Pier is beautiful, has always been. The sun tinges the horizon in strokes of colour that is reflected in the lake which ripples all over. The entire lake looks ethereal like this, with the brushstrokes of colour in the water interspersed with the pink of the lotus blooms and the green of the leaves. It is peaceful to be here, to sit like this, and enjoy the sunset.

In his heart, though, there is no peace, only weariness. Eight years since Wei Wuxian's return, since his nephew became a Sect Leader, since the revelation about his golden core.

His brother's last, terrible gift to him.

Jiang Cheng places a hand on his lower dantian.

How has he never noticed it before?

How is it that he had never realised what was happening with his brother?

Today it is eight years to the day since Wen Ning has revealed the secret of his golden core. Even though Jiang Cheng will never forgive the fierce corpse, he is also grateful. Not for the surgery he helped his sister perform without his knowledge, but for being the only one who thought that Jiang Cheng had the right to know the truth. Whatever Wen Ning's intentions, he had told him something that he had a right to know.

Anger is still his most prominent emotion when it comes to Wei Wuxian, though, but there is also grief and a love that he has never been able to get rid of. Even if they hadn't spent the last eight years, dancing around each other, making tentative overtures, Jiang Cheng would still love his brother. He has accepted they will never be what they once were, but he doesn't mind that. What bothers him is that despite all their efforts, they are still nowhere, and Lan Wangji seems to think that Jiang Cheng shouldn't be allowed to speak to Wei Wuxian at all.

That hurts more than it should.

His hand splays on his body. Wei Wuxian is in a different body now. Mo Xuanyu already has a golden core even if underdeveloped. Besides which, Wen Qing is dead. He doesn't think there is any other doctor who could have been able to do what she did.

He rises as the sun sinks behind the horizon and lanterns are lit along the walkways. Disciples bow as he passes, and he nods to them. He still has work to do, and he enters his study, sits down, and pulls the stack of paperwork towards him.

He cannot stop thinking of the golden core inside him.

He cannot stop thinking of his brother.

He wants another chance so desperately. He wants his brother back. He thinks he will give up anything for a chance to have A-Jie and Wei Wuxian back again.

It is useless, pointless, to wish for such things. Leave them in the past, Wei Wuxian had said, except how can he do that when Wei Wuxian's golden core reminds him every day of everything he has lost as well as everything he has gained?

Even pride in the Sect he has built up from the ashes is not enough to get rid of the feeling of loss that permeates every part of him.

What he wouldn't do to go back and fix things! As impossible as the dream is, Jiang Cheng wishes with all his heart.

That night when he goes to bed, he whispers a prayer, even though he knows it is no use. There are no gods, and the immortal whom he thought would help was also just a lie. There is no one to listen to his prayer, to grant him his wish, but he can still whisper it aloud in the quiet of his room.

It may never come true, but Jiang Cheng can still have this one wish, this one desperate hope in the quiet places inside.

And if he feels something inside him whispering a similar prayer, almost a reflection of his own, he thinks that it has to be one of those things that happens between sleep and waking.

One

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng lands in the past, and makes a few decisions

Chapter Notes

Bonus Chapter! It grew so much in the editing, and I hope you all enjoy it. Lots of angst and some fluff and Jiang Cheng is actually using his words to communicate his feelings.

He wakes to a world of pain, and is disoriented for a moment. The next he realises he can't feel his golden core and the flare of alarm makes him sit up, breathing hard.

“Jiang Cheng! What happened?” The voice has an edge of distress, and the shock of hearing it drives away the panic he was slipping into.

He stares at a face that is as familiar to him as his own.

Wei Wuxian.

In his own body, and with his own face, which is now pale, and furrowed with worry, his hands on this shoulder. It takes him a moment to realise where he is. The Yiling supervisory office, after the burning of Lotus Pier.

Bitterness floods him.

The nightmare makes sense, in a way. Hadn't been thinking about it, after all? Of his golden core, and of this life? Figures that his mind would give him a bad dream, to remind him of the time when he had had to live without a golden core.

To remind him that his brother did sacrifice everything for him, no matter how misguided. After all, Wei Wuxian has been as young as he himself had been then, a fact he can no longer ignore as he looks at his face. He wants to be angry still, to demand why he did it to him. Jiang Cheng could have lived without it. He would have got used to it.

Losing Wei Wuxian has never been worth gaining a golden core for.

Losing A-Jie has never been worth anything.

And yet, as he stares at the anxious face of his brother, the simmering rage drains away. All he can think about are the years without Wei Wuxian; he remembers how his brother had grown distant, and had pulled away, and had finally left altogether. He recalls the years when Wei Wuxian had been dead when Jiang Cheng had hated him and loved him in equal measure, had missed him with as much ferocity as he used to hunt down demonic cultivators.

Yet, here he sat before him, still shining, *whole*, the brother he had known all his life, his hands on his shoulders, *warm*.

Alive.

In his own body.

Jiang Cheng has lived long enough to know that having Wei Wuxian's golden core in him, being a strong cultivator, has not made him either happier or less alone.

"Have I been unconscious?" he asks, because he wants a dream that doesn't end in blood and tears. It is almost impossible to have a conversation with Wei Wuxian in reality, not with Hanguang Jun hovering, but here, it is just the two of them.

Why is it that his body keeps hurting so much? Is that even possible in dreams?

"Asleep," Wei Wuxian said. "You fell asleep early yesterday." He moves away, and Jiang Cheng already misses him.

Jiang Cheng doesn't know what day it is. He doesn't know if the conversation about Baoshen Sanren has happened yet. If it has, Wei Wuxian must already have arranged with the Wen siblings for the golden core transfer.

Rage and fondness rushes through him in equal measure.

"Come here," Jiang Cheng says, and Wei Wuxian approaches again, sitting down on the edge of the bed. Jiang Cheng lunges to catch his brother in a tight hug. Wei Wuxian hugs back, a little bit unsure, but his arms are warm, and Jiang Cheng can't remember the last time he hugged his brother.

It must have been here, he thinks, when he came back during the war. Where we killed Wen Chao and Wen Zhuliu.

It was here, all those years ago that he had last hugged Wei Wuxian.

A sob breaks free from him, and he can't believe how real all this feels. Maybe it is a dream, but he wants things to be different in this one.

Make different choices.

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian says, sounding confused. "Are you all right?"

"I love you," Jiang Cheng says, the words he had wanted to say all his life, and never could because he has never learned how to. He is surprised at how easily they come now. Dreams

are nice things to have when they're like this one. "You're my brother, and I... I haven't always treated you right, and I'm sorry. You saved me and I was ungrateful."

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian doesn't seem to know what to say. "What are you talking about? I didn't do anything. Wen Ning saved you. And Wen Qing, I already told you that."

The familiar fury at the sound of the Wen siblings' name is not there.

It all feels too real to be simply a dream. His body hurts so much, his lower dantian where his golden core was, his chest where the marks from the discipline whip throbs furiously, and there are minor aches and pains all over his body.

"Can you promise me something?" Jiang Cheng asks, holding on to his brother despite the fact that his chest physically hurts with the proximity.

"Anything," Wei Wuxian says immediately. Of course he would say that. That is just who he is.

Has been.

Jiang Cheng swallows down his grief and his bitterness. Dream or not, he has his brother in his arms, and he wants to savour it for as long as he can.

"Never lie to me," Jiang Cheng says. It is as much as he can allow himself to say. Because this feels far too real, and he doesn't want to push away Wei Wuxian by asking about the golden core. A more immediate problem claims his attention. He releases Wei Wuxian who pulls away, looking a bit dazed. "Is there any food?" Jiang Cheng asks. "I am hungry."

He is almost sure that he isn't supposed to feel hungry in a dream. Or in pain. Or to feel how his brother is so warm and real. Wei Wuxian nods and stands up.

"I'll bring you something," he says, his smile shadowed, but still real.

Jiang Cheng takes a few deep breaths just to centre himself, breathing through the pain. He needs the respite, a moment alone to put his thoughts in order, and to-

Panic surges within, and he tamps it down.

Somehow, miraculously, impossibly, he has ended up in the past. He ignores the fact that he has no golden core. A golden core seems the smallest of his priorities right now. If he is back in the past, he needs to put together a plan to stop Wei Wuxian from stupidly sacrificing his core to him. And also to keep A-Jie alive.

The food is plain, rice and some chicken. He gets up with his brother's help and sits at the table, and Wei Wuxian kneels across from him.

"What is our next move?" he asks Wei Wuxian as he eats. Wei Wuxian's bowl remains largely untouched. "When can we safely leave?"

Wei Wuxian gives him a sharp glance at that, and looks at his food. He starts eating then, slowly, as if trying to figure out a puzzle.

“I’ll have to ask Wen Qing to take a look at you,” Wei Wuxian says finally, fidgeting. “But... where will we go?”

Jiang Cheng has already lived through all this once, and he knows that the Sunshot Campaign will start soon, if it already hasn’t. The last time, Jiang Cheng was able to make contributions only because of Wei Wuxian’s golden core inside him, and Wei Wuxian was able to contribute only through demonic cultivation that had destroyed him in the end.

Even if Wei Wuxian is alive in the time Jiang Cheng came from, he is tired of being alone. Wei Wuxian and Jin Ling are all he has left of his family, and Wei Wuxian and he are not even on talking terms.

“After what happened, there is bound to be pushback against the Wens from the other Sects,” Jiang Cheng says confidently. “We can go to Qinghe, and meet with Chifeng Zun, and find out what’s happening. If there’s going to be a war, we can join the war efforts.”

Wei Wuxian frowns, another sharp glance at him. “But what about your core?”

“What about it? It’s gone, isn’t it?” Jiang Cheng asks. Realisation hits that Wei Wuxian has already come up with the Baoshen Sanren idea and that he has agreed to it. “But I’m still alive, and healthy. I can still help.”

Once his body stops hurting so much. He will have to ask Wen Qing about it.

“No, that’s not...” Wei Wuxian lowers his voice. “What about Baoshen Sanren?”

“There’s no time,” Jiang Cheng says, even as dread pools in his belly. “And we can come back after the war, if needed. I just... I want to get going, Wei Wuxian. Let us... let us burn their bodies today.”

He cannot remember when they did it the last time. He cannot even remember what he felt, the haze of grief and pain, and the throb of *revenge revenge revenge*, and the hope of gaining a new golden core taking away from the immediacy of the present.

This time he wants to remember. For all their faults, they had been his parents, and he had loved them, and maybe in their own ways, they had loved him too.

He is both their son, and he has to remember that, honour that.

I’m going to attempt the impossible, A-Die, A-Niang. I hope you’ll be proud of me.

A part of him wants to laugh at seeking their approval even now. He hopes that he has done a better job with Jin Ling than they did with him. It is still not as good a one as A-Jie would have done, but at least Jin Ling has grown up well. A Sect Leader and with friends who will stand by him through everything.

He misses his nephew, and he is prouder of him than he can say.

He wishes he had used his words to tell him that more often. He had tried to show it, and he can only hope that Jin Ling knows.

Fondness swells inside him as he thinks of how Jin Ling has taken to try and fight Jiang Cheng's battles for him despite Jiang Cheng telling him not to. Jin Ling has taken to glaring and making snide remarks at people who are rude to Jiang Cheng, and it is bemusing and deeply satisfying to see Jin Ling glare at Hanguang Jun with as much contempt and disdain as he can muster.

He hopes that he can give Jin Ling both his parents in this life.

A part of him is worried that without Wei Wuxian's demonic cultivation and the Stygian Tiger amulet, winning the Sunshot Campaign may not be as easy as in the prior time. But he thinks that at the most the war will drag on for a few more months. The Wens will be defeated in the end, and that is all that matters. There is also the fact that Jiang Cheng knows most of the things that will happen. He can use that knowledge, he thinks.

War is strategy as well, in the end, and he can pass off his knowledge as strategy, hit the Wen in force where they're weakest, make plans for surprises where they're strong, and maybe they may just win this war without having to destroy his brother.

He wonders if he should just go off and kill Jin Guangshan before the war even starts.

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian says suddenly, but he sounds hesitant. "If we go to the other Sects... they will know... about your core..."

Jiang Cheng brings some rice to his mouth, and starts chewing. The person he was in those days would have worried about it so badly, would have railed at his own helplessness, would have hated the shame of having other people know that he has no golden core, that he is just an average person, and not a cultivator anymore.

He swallows his food, and says evenly, "I am aware."

He had been Sandu Shengshou, had built his Sect to be one of the richest and strongest after it has burned down, had raised a nephew from infancy, had squatted in the sun alongside his men, nailing planks, had carried timber, sawed wood, dug latrines, had haggled for hours with vendors while he rebuilt his home.

And he had done it all by himself.

That man had had no pride in those days, because he couldn't afford it.

He had carried an infant to Sect Meetings, had worked till late at night, holding Jin Ling in one arm, had worked on his correspondence with Jin Ling in the room because he didn't want to let him out of sight even for an instant, because he trusted no one to look after the last remaining member of his family.

In the now, he feels a twinge of regret for the loss of Zidian, and lets it go. Because he has learned through blood and sweat and tears, and endless nights of grief that he would rather

lose all that than the man who sits opposite him, worrying his teeth between his lips, the man who he never stopped loving, and whom he had hated and missed desperately for thirteen years and more.

His brother who had been forced into a dark path because he had tried to help Jiang Cheng.

“I won’t be completely useless,” he says now. “Maybe I can’t fight in the frontlines, but I can still fight with ordinary weapons.”

How would that feel, to never touch Sandu again? To fight with an ordinary sword instead? To never feel the crackle of Zidian on his fingers, to never see its purple lighting lay waste to his enemies? To never feel the swoop of his stomach as Sandu takes to the air with him balanced atop?

To never be able to draw Suibian and be reminded of his brother’s sacrifice?

Suibian had stayed in Jin Guangyao’s treasure room for thirteen years. Suibian had been in his belt for three months when he searched desperately for its owner. Suibian had been in his hands for *months* before Wei Wuxian had finally come for it.

He can do this.

“But...” Wei Wuxian looks troubled as his food stays untouched. “They... they may not accept you as the Sect Leader.” He speaks quickly, with a nervous glance at Jiang Cheng as if afraid of his reaction.

Jiang Cheng’s actual memories of this time is a bit fuzzy, but he can imagine how his younger self would have reacted to such an announcement.

It is a good thing that he is a jaded and lonely man, and not a teenager with vengeance and anger and ambition in his heart.

“I know,” he says. “I can’t be Sect Leader, but you can. You’re the Head Disciple; your name is in the registry immediately after mine.”

Wei Wuxian stares, mouth falling open, as Jiang Cheng finishes the last of his rice, and places his bowl on the table.

“I can’t be Sect Leader,” Wei Wuxian says, voice panicked. “It should be you!”

Jiang Cheng sighs, “Obviously, I’d rather not leave the Sect to you with the kind of shit you pull, but... do we have a choice?”

Wei Wuxian frowns, “Shijie can be—” he begins, but Jiang Cheng shakes his head.

“Not if she wants to marry the peacock,” he says. “And we both know that she does.”

Wei Wuxian can say any number of things about Jin Zixuan and how undeserving he is of their sister’s heart, but neither of them can deny that the man has had that heart even when he

hadn't wanted it. They both know that their sister hopes to someday be his wife despite the broken engagement.

Besides, Jiang Cheng wants to hold his nephew in his arms again, to hear him call him Jiujiu again. For that to happen, for Jin Ling to be born, A-Jie has to marry Jin Zixuan.

Jiang remembers her happiness in the days after her marriage, punctuated as it was for worry for Wei Wuxian and for himself. Remembers her gently chiding him for working too hard, remembers the touch of her soft hands on his face, murmuring, *A-Cheng, you've grown so thin, remember to feed yourself more.*

He blinks back tears, and focusses on Wei Wuxian who has a pout on his face.

"Not the peacock," he mutters. "If she's Sect Leader, she never has to marry the peacock."

"No," Jiang Cheng agrees. "But she wants to, and would you take away that chance from her?"

Wei Wuxian looks torn, and Jiang Cheng knows it's a low blow, but he can't have his Sect die.

"But," Wei Wuxian starts again, maybe wanting another argument.

"It's either you or no one," Jiang Cheng says ruthlessly. "We're the last ones, Wei Wuxian... there's no one else, and if neither I or A-Jie can be the Sect Leader, there's only you."

He feels desperate to make him understand, to make him see that this is the only way. Wei Wuxian shakes his head again, searching for something, and Jiang Cheng knows that he's going to bring up Baoshen Sanren again. He sits straighter, fixes his brother with a hard stare, and makes a decision. It is one his younger self would never have made, and it is one his older self has not yet made, and now will never get to make.

But he is heartsick, and lonely, and he wants his siblings back alive. If it comes to a choice between his golden core and his brother, he would always choose his brother; that choice was already made once, and maybe it is time to do it again in a way that his brother can understand.

"Listen," he says. "I wasn't caught by the Wens because I wanted to go back to Lotus Pier to retrieve my parents' bodies. When you were buying food, a group of Wen Sect cultivators caught up. I discovered them early and left where I sat, hiding at the corner of the street and didn't get caught, but they were patrolling the streets and would have soon run into you outside. That was why I ran out and distracted them."

Horror appears in Wei Wuxian's face, and anger. Tears spill over, and he grabs a fistful of Jiang Cheng's robes. "You got yourself caught for me? Why? I am—"

"Why do you think?" Jiang Cheng interrupts, and Wei Wuxian glares.

Jiang Cheng has a moment of recollecting Lan Wangji and how he and Wei Wuxian had finally got their acts together. Then he decides that Lan Wangji can go suck on a lemon for all

he cares. He is set on this course, and he won't be deterred by thoughts of *that* man of all people.

If Lan Wangji wants to be with Wei Wuxian in this life, he will just have to marry into the Jiang Sect, after he proves to Jiang Cheng that he deserves his brother.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian shakes him a little. “How can you... you should never have done that... you should have let them capture me!”

His voice is low, but shrill, and he is angrier than Jiang Cheng can ever remember him being even if tears are still cascading down his cheeks. His past self would never have done it. His future self could never do it to the Wei Wuxian that had come back from the dead.

But in the here and now, his brother still is, who still loves him, Jiang Cheng can do this. He lifts his hands, and cups his brother's face. “Why do you think?” he asks with infinite care. “Because you're my brother, and I love you, and I would lose my core a thousand times over than lose you.”

Wei Wuxian looks as if someone has hit him over the head. “Jiang Cheng,” he whispers, his grip loosening.

“Sect Leader,” Jiang Cheng says, not letting go, not letting Wei Wuxian twist his face away, or to shift his eyes away from his.

Wei Wuxian crumples, and pulls Jiang Cheng closer, and it is awkward with the table between them, but they hug, and Wei Wuxian's face is buried in Jiang Cheng's shoulder, and his robe is getting wet, but Jiang Cheng doesn't care because his face is squished against his brother's shoulder too, and he is sobbing as well.

That is how Wen Qing finds them when she walks in, and Jiang Cheng can see the barely concealed relief in her eyes as Wei Wuxian explains everything to her, speech halting, faltering, and sobs breaking every now and then. He is still holding Jiang Cheng, and it is uncomfortable, and Jiang Cheng is sure there will be bruises with how tightly he is being held, and his body still hurts, but he doesn't mind because he cannot remember the last time someone has held him like this, and he has missed it, and he has missed—he still misses—his brother so fiercely and so desperately that he doesn't want to let go either.

Lan Wangji, thinks Jiang Cheng, spitefully and with all the pettiness that belongs to his current, older, angrier, self, can go suck a lemon.

Two

Chapter Summary

Jin Ling receives a message, goes to Lotus Pier, gets some very disturbing news, and has to make a decision

Chapter Notes

This is one of those chapters with some minor character bashing. Jin Ling's thoughts about Lan Wangji are not complementary because he thinks that the man is being unfair to Jiang Cheng. He thinks that Lan Wangji is stopping his uncles from reconciling when both of them obviously want to, and hence is hostile towards him.

Enjoy the update. Looks like I'll be updating faster than I thought!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Jin Ling knows something is wrong the moment he steps into Lotus Pier. Even if not for the urgent summons that forced him to cut short the night hunt he had planned with his friends, he would have known something is wrong.

Lotus Pier is quiet as he lands, and Lotus Pier is never quiet.

Jin Ling should know. He grew up here.

He may have been the Jin Sect heir, but he is a Jiang as well, and his jiujiu had raised him here from an infant, in this place that is more home than Koi Tower ever has been, that is more home even now, when he has been Sect Leader of LanlingJin for eight years already, and master of Koi Tower. He knows Lotus Pier, knows every breath of the breeze that stirs the lake, knows the rivers that wind through Yunmeng, knows the ebb and flow of life here as intimately as he knows his own breathing.

But today, it is different. The merchants are not shouting, but looks anxious, the crowd is virtually non-existent, and the Jiang disciples are tense and silent. There is no training going on in the grounds, and the guards look at him with complicated expressions.

More importantly, Jiujiu is not here to greet him.

Jin Ling cannot breathe for just a moment. The urgent message that came from his uncle's second-in-command, the silence and stillness of a place that is always full of sound and

motion, the looks on the faces of the guards who let him in-

The absence of his uncle-

And Jin Ling can't breathe.

"Jin Zongzhu," his uncle's second-in-command speaks, but he sounds like he's underwater, and Jin Ling can't breathe. His knees dig into the wooden walkway, and his hands are bleeding. When did he fall?

A hand is on his back.

"Breathe," the voice is familiar, but Jin Ling cannot place it. "Jin Ling, breathe!"

And he does, gulps in air greedily as if he has been drowning, and his knees hurt, and there are tears running down his face as his uncle's second-in-command, Zhang Xiu who has been at Jiujiu's side for as long as Jin Ling can remember helps him to his feet.

"Jiujiu," he whispers. "Zhang Xiu, where's Jiujiu?" He can hear the edge of panic in his own voice, and he doesn't care.

"Follow me," Zhang Xiu says, and Jin Ling does.

To his relief, they are going towards the healer's pavilion. Maybe Jiujiu got hurt on a night hunt. But he can't help but think of the unnatural stillness of Lotus Pier, as if the people and the place as a whole, is holding its breath.

Maybe he's hurt badly, but even that is all right. His uncle is a fighter, and he has never, ever, given up, not even when he had lost everything, every single person of his family except Jin Ling who is more Jin than Jiang anyway. If Jiujiu is alive, he will fight, and he will come back to Jin Ling. Nothing matters as long as Jiujiu is alive, and Jin Ling will-

Jin Ling will-

He will tell his Jiujiu that he loves him, that he is important to him, the only parent Jin Ling has ever known.

(Not the only one, but there is a scar on Jin Ling's neck reminding him daily that not everyone is worthy of the kind of trust that Jin Ling has in his jiujiu.)

He has never been able to say the words any more than Jiujiu has been able to, but he knows, has always known that to his jiujiu, there is no one more important than Jin Ling, and he can hope that Jiujiu understands how Jin Ling feels too, but still he is resolved to tell him that.

Jiujiu has to know it, and know without any ambiguity.

It doesn't matter that Jin Ling is an adult now, that he has been a Sect Leader for eight years, that he and his uncle has not visited each other as frequently as they once did, because Jin Ling can't-

He can't do this without his uncle.

Jiujiu has been the one constant in his life from his earliest days. Jin Ling respects his parents, considers himself a filial son, had known that they were good people who loved him, but he has never known them.

All he has ever known was his Jiujiu, and his xiao-Shushu who it turned out has just been pretending all along, and was a murderer and a liar.

Jiujiu on the other hand-

Jiujiu may speak harshly, may threaten to break his legs, but he also holds Jin Ling when he cries or wakes up from nightmares, sits with Jin Ling and explains things to him. He may yell and shout when Jin Ling sneaks off without telling anyone and gets into trouble, but there is nothing but concern in his eyes, and his hands are gentle when they check him for injuries. Jiujiu may tell him that he should do better than others, but when he doesn't, he never asks him why, never says he's not good enough, but only checks to see if he's safe and yells at him over something stupid he did that might have got him in danger.

Jin Ling needs his uncle, who has been his *parent*, whom Jin Ling calls father in the depths of his heart, even as he feels unfilial towards his own father whose sword he carries. He is a Jin, but he is also a Jiang, and Lotus Pier and its master are his home and family that he never wants to lose.

And why would he lose them? His jiujiu is a strong cultivator, and an extremely dangerous warrior. There is no danger that fazes him.

The only time Jin Ling has seen panic in his uncle's eyes was in the Guanyin Temple when Jin Ling had been in danger, first from his xiao-Shushu and then from the fierce corpse of Chifeng Zun.

Jiujiu has to be all right.

The door to the infirmary is open, and Zhang Xiu leads him to one of the private rooms. Jiujiu is on a bed, looking healthy. He doesn't look injured, and there is colour on his cheeks. He has not lost weight. His chest is moving, and he looks like he's just sleeping.

"He has been like this for three weeks," Zhang Xiu says. "His spiritual energy levels are fine, and his golden core is also fine. The healers can't find anything wrong, no traces of a curse or resentful energy or anything. His meridians are all clear, and his qi is circulating naturally. We called in a few curse breakers and none of them are able to find anything either."

Jin Ling sits on the bed. "Have you contacted Wei Wuxian?" he asks.

Zhang Xiu shakes his head. "Your uncle has left explicit instructions on what to do and who to contact in case of an emergency that may incapacitate him. He revised it after... after Wei Wuxian returned to life, adding a provision that Wei Wuxian should be called only if his life is in imminent danger."

“And it’s not,” Jin Ling mutters.

“It’s not,” Zhang Xiu agrees. “He’s perfectly healthy and apart from the fact that he is not waking up, there is nothing wrong with him.”

Jin Ling nods, stands. “I’m going to the Cloud recesses,” he says. “His instructions don’t bind me, only you.”

The relief on Zhang Xiu’s face is palpable. “I was hoping you’d see it that way.”

Jin Ling rubs a hand over his face. He will have to send a butterfly to Jingyi, Sizhui and Zizhen and tell them he won’t be able to join the hunt. They will be disappointed, but they will also understand.

“How many people know?” he asks.

“You, me and Zhou Lai are the only ones who know the truth,” Zhang Xiu says. “Everyone else has been led to believe that Zongzhu injured himself in a night hunt and is recuperating.” He bites his lips. “Everyone seems to think that it means he’s dying.”

Jin Ling is not surprised. Lotus Pier is attuned to its master, and even when they don’t know what is happening, they know something is wrong.

“Why is there no training today?” he asks.

“We finished early,” he says. “I sent some of the disciples on night hunts across Yunmeng. The fewer people that are here, the less chances of someone finding out what really happened.”

“I’ll take my leave first,” Jin Ling says. “Send me a message if anything changes.”

He sends a butterfly to his friends and mounts his sword.

The last time he had seen Wei Wuxian has been three weeks ago at the discussion conference in Qinghe. They had not parted amicably then which is why Jin Ling needs to do this in person. Messages can be ignored, and if Jin Ling knows Hanguang Jun, and he does, the man is likely to persuade Wei Wuxian to ignore Jin Ling’s pleas for help.

In Cloud Recesses, Jin Ling is a visiting Sect Leader and Zewu Jun is still the Lan Sect Leader. If there’s anyone Hanguang Jun will listen to other than Wei Wuxian, it is Zewu Jun. Besides, Jin Ling doesn’t have to convince Hanguang Jun of anything. He doesn’t even have to convince Wei Wuxian, because he knows the man. If Wei Wuxian learns that Jiujiu is in trouble, he will drop everything and come running.

Jin Ling has had very few certainties in his life apart from his uncle, especially since Guanyin temple. This knowledge of Wei Wuxian is one of them. If Jiujiu is in trouble, Wei Wuxian will help. What Wei Wuxian doesn’t know and that Jin Ling does, is that the reverse is also true. If Wei Wuxian needs him, Jiujiu will also come running, even as he loudly proclaims his indifference.

It used to drive him crazy, the way his uncles danced around each other, behaved as if they didn't care if the other didn't talk to them, and yet loved each other so ferociously that they would literally give their lives for each other. Jin Ling thinks it's unfair that the whole world knows what Wei Wuxian sacrificed for Jiujiu, but no one except Jin Ling knows what Jiujiu sacrificed for Wei Wuxian.

If he hadn't promised his Jiujiu that he will never tell, he would have flung it in Hanguang Jun's judgemental face a few times. Because, whatever he may be to Wei Wuxian, what gives him the right to judge Jiujiu? He doesn't even know Jiujiu. How would he like it if someone prevented him from seeing Zewu Jun or talking to him?

Hanguang Jun is the worst hypocrite Jin Ling has ever known, and he hates that he has to face that man again. But this is for Jiujiu and there isn't anything Jin Ling won't brave for his uncle.

Jiujiu will probably yell at him and threaten to break his legs if he hears it. He will probably tell Jin Ling that he shouldn't worry about him, that it's for his uncle to worry about him, and not the other way round. Jin Ling thinks that he will do anything to hear his uncle's voice again.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: back in the past, Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian make it to the Unclean Realm, and more brotherly bonding ensue

Three

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian continues to communicate

Chapter Notes

New chapter!! Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wei Wuxian tries again and again to change Jiang Cheng's mind, but Jiang Cheng has had years and years to realise that having Wei Wuxian at his side is more important than having his golden core. He isn't even afraid for his Sect, for who embodied their motto more than his impossible brother? He knows Wei Wuxian will build it back from the ashes, just as he himself once did in another life, and Jiang Cheng is determined that his brother at least, won't be alone in that task.

In this life, there will be no demonic cultivation for his brother. Jiang Cheng will stand by him, and help him. After all, he has experience and memory to fall back on. This time, neither of them will be alone, and Wei Wuxian won't draw the ire of the cultivation world. Nor will he stand alone against the world, trying to protect the tattered remains of a family he made for himself in place of the family he had lost.

The family he had thrown away, but did he really? He had given Jiang Cheng the very essence of himself, scooped himself out till he was hollow, and all that was left was resentment, and Jiang Cheng can't even blame him for it. He thinks that Wei Wuxian had to have resented it at some point, had to have hated him for it.

Why else did he consistently push Jiang Cheng away every time he tried to reach out? In the end, the Wen had only been an excuse for him to leave Lotus Pier. It may have been his home once, but it had taken everything from him, and Jiang Cheng had nearly whipped him out of there after he came back to life.

Whatever happens in this life, Jiang Cheng won't let his brother down, won't leave his side, won't let him make that sacrifice. He has had years with a golden core, and he has learned that it wasn't enough to fill the space at his right, that it isn't enough to make his nightmares stop.

He still has nightmares of Wen Zhuliu, and he thinks it will be worse now, because he has the memory of his sister dying in his arms now, and... and...

And she's alive now.

They leave at the end of two weeks, Jiang Cheng slow, but keeping up. He had walked around the compound, worked out with non-spiritual weapons, even practised his archery while he was in the Yiling Supervisory office, dressed in Wen Robes to avoid attracting attention. Before leaving, they had changed into robes of a nondescript brown and grey, and he had thanked Wen Qing and Wen Ning. He can see the gentle stuttering diffident boy in the ghost general he knows, and he hopes he can save them from the fate that awaits them. His offer to them to come with is flatly rejected by Wen Qing.

"It doesn't matter," she says. "If there's a war against the Wens, my brother and I are doomed. Your allies won't accept us based only on your word that me and my brother are harmless."

From past, bitter experience, Jiang Cheng knows how true that is.

He has tried, at least, and he will have to be satisfied with that. In the last life, Wei Wuxian had felt that he owed Wen Qing and Wen Ning because of the core transfer rather than anything else. In this life, that obligation is not there for one. For another, Wei Wuxian is the Sect Leader, and not a demonic cultivator. If he wants to protect the Wens, he will find a better way to do it.

This time, Jiang Cheng will stand with him.

The atmosphere on the road is tense, and Jiang Cheng keeps an ear out for rumours. There is a movement against the Wens, with Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue at its head. Most minor sects have also joined. Just like in their last life, LanlingJin has decided to stay away, bleating nonsense.

Jiang Cheng makes plans in his head even as he and Wei Wuxian makes their way to the Unclean Realm. The sentries at the gates don't let them in; their appearance is too prepossessing for the heirs of a major Sect. Jiang Cheng asks them to send for Nie Huaisang who knows them. After some whispered discussions and suspicious glances, they are let into the guardhouse, and asked to wait.

When Nie Huaisang appears, his brother and Lan Xichen are with him.

Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian bows to them. "Nie Zongzhu, Lan Zongzhu, Nie-xiong."

"Wei-xiong! Jiang-xiong!" Nie Huaisang cries.

Jiang Cheng draws a deep breath. "I beg your pardon for our unkempt appearances," he says.

Nie Mingjue bows to him. "Jiang Zongzhu," he says. "No apologies are necessary. We're glad you are here."

They are led into the Unclean Realm and into the guest quarters. Baths are drawn, clean robes are provided, as well as food. They are asked to rest, but they refuse to stay separated. In the end, a spare cot is put in Jiang Cheng's room, and an additional privacy screen.

They both end up in Jiang Cheng's bed anyway, clutching each other desperately.

"We made it," Wei Wuxian says, sounding giddy.

Jiang Cheng smirks. "Did you doubt that?" he asks.

Wei Wuxian gives him a hesitant look. "Are you going to tell them?"

Jiang Cheng knows what he means. If he tells them that his core is crushed by Wen Zhuliu, Wei Wuxian will never be able to pull off his Baoshen Sanren trick again. No one else will believe him, or if they did, he will be mobbed by all the cultivators who have lost their cores to Wen Zhuliu.

Besides, Jiang Cheng thinks that there has to be a time frame within which the core transfer has to be completed. That will explain the resignation and minor signs of upset that Wei Wuxian has been showing for the last few days.

"I am," Jiang Cheng softly. "It may be only the three of us now, but we are still the YunmengJiang, and our Sect needs its Leader."

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian whines.

"You're not getting out of it now," Jiang Cheng warns, a smile on his face, adding. "Once we've told everyone, and has you installed, I'll go to Meishan and bring A-Jie here."

Wei Wuxian looks troubled. "Are you sure?" he asks. "You'll be alone."

"I'll be fine," Jiang Cheng says softly. "I'll send you word once I reach there. I may stay a few days there, so don't worry if I'm not back immediately, all right? I'll try and recruit people on the way. We can't be a Sect with only three."

Wei Wuxian seems nervous at the thought of being alone, but nods.

"If anyone gives you grief, or tries," Jiang Cheng says, "Ignore them, all right? You're a Sect Leader now, and you can't be engaging in every argument with every asshole."

"Noted," Wei Wuxian says with some asperity, but his eyes are soft.

"Also, you're our brother," he says. "Mine and A-Jie's, and this position is yours by right. Don't forget that, all right?"

"Ah, Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian murmurs. "How can I forget that I'm your brother?"

You already did once, Jiang Cheng thinks. You walked away from me as if I am nothing. You told me to put everything in the past, and walked away.

Wei Wuxian's eyelids are already drooping, and Jiang Cheng holds him in his arms, and closes his own eyes. He has been given a second chance here and he's not going to waste it. He wishes that he had realised in his last life how little a golden core means compared to a brother or a sister, alive and happy and within his arm's reach.

He tugs Wei Wuxian closer and wraps his arms around him. "I'm glad you're here," he says. "I'm glad you're safe."

"I'm not the one who purposely got myself caught by a Wen patrol," Wei Wuxian mutters, and despite the light tone, there is something heavy there as well, something that sounds like guilt and self-recrimination. "Why wouldn't I be safe?"

Jiang Cheng holds him tight. "I would do that again for you," he says softly. "I'm sorry I blamed you for everything. None of it was your fault. I wish... I wish I could have stopped mother from whipping you."

Wei Wuxian's hand is rubbing soothing circles on his back. "You tried," Wei Wuxian whispered.

"You shouldn't have pushed me away," Jiang Cheng says, voice quiet.

Wei Wuxian buries his face in Jiang Cheng's chest, curling up, and his voice is wet, "What would have been the use in you getting whipped too?"

"She wouldn't have hurt me," Jiang Cheng whispered. Of that, he is sure. "Promise me you won't do that again. That you will let me help you."

Wei Wuxian's voice is a sob as he whispers, "All right."

Chapter End Notes

Next up, Jin Ling goes to Wei Wuxian who is not happy

Four

Chapter Summary

Wei Wuxian has a meltdown

Chapter Notes

I'm editing faster than I expected, so this is getting updated without rhyme or reason right now.

I am so grateful to everyone who has read, commented, kudosed, subscribed and bookmarked. You're all love!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wei Wuxian wakes, not to the usual quiet of the Jingshi, but to loud noises, the unmistakeable sounds of an altercation. In any other place he would have ignored it, but this is Cloud Recesses where loud noises and fighting are forbidden, and Wei Wuxian wonders what is happening. He gets up and puts on his clothes, gathers his hair into a rough knot, ignores the breakfast laid on the table and goes to the door.

He hears Jin Ling even before he opens the door.

“Who the fuck are you to decide I can’t see my Dajiu?” Jin Ling spits, and Wei Wuxian stills. There can be only one person Jin Ling takes that tone with, and Wei Wuxian doesn’t want to be rude to his nephew, but he cannot let *anyone* talk to Lan Zhan like that.

“Wangji,” Zewu Jun speaks quietly. “Perhaps you should let Sect Leader Jin talk to his uncle.”

“No,” Lan Zhan’s voice is quiet but firm.

“Who are you to decide who he will talk to or not?” Jin Ling shouts. “Are you his husband or are you his jailer?”

Wei Wuxian flinches. Jin Ling doesn’t know the import of his words, but Wei Wuxian does, and he cannot let it go. He opens the door to give Jin Ling a piece of his mind, but Jin Ling sees him and barrels through, crying, “Dajiu,” and throws himself into his arms and bursts into tears. Wei Wuxian can do nothing but hold him, feeling helpless.

Jin Ling hasn't cried in years. Not since the Guanyin temple eight years ago, and Wei Wuxian has no idea on earth what to do, and what caused this. He looks at Zewu Jun and Lan Zhan helplessly even as he hugs Jin Ling, and soothingly rubs his back. Zewu Jun looks resigned as if he was expecting something like it. Lan Zhan looks shocked, and embarrassed.

Wei Wuxian wants to be angry at his nephew for shouting at Lan Zhan and for the unkind things he said, but now he is also angry at Lan Zhan for attempting to keep Jin Ling away from him when he is obviously distraught. He loves his husband, and is grateful for him every day, but his overprotectiveness borders on stifling at times.

"Jing Ling," he says. "What's wrong?"

"It's Jiujiu," Jin Ling whispers and sobs wrack him again.

Wei Wuxian feels cold, and he takes a staggering step back, though Jin Ling is still clinging to him.

Jin Ling is here, crying is heart out and-

He has said it's to do with Jiang Cheng.

Zewu Jun requested Lan Zhan to let Jin Ling speak to him when Zewu Jun never interferes in Lan Zhan's decisions when it comes to him.

Zewu Jun looks like he had *expected* it when Jin Ling flung himself into Wei Wuxian's arms, sobbing.

And Jiang Cheng-

No. Jiang Cheng has to be all right. He has to be. Maybe he got hurt in a night hunt and-

And-

Jin Ling will never leave his uncle's side if he's hurt.

But Jin Ling is here.

"Jin Ling," he says, and he can hardly recognise his voice with how it's shaking. He wants to comfort his nephew, but-

But-

Jiang Cheng is his brother. His little brother.

And Wei Wuxian has not-

Not even once.

All he can think is that he let Jiang Cheng think that he had given his core to him out of duty. That he had never once, in either of his two lives said the words he should have.

That Jiang Cheng is his brother, that he loves him, and leaving the past behind didn't mean that he wanted to leave his brother behind.

"Jin Ling," he says again, keeping his voice steady with a near superhuman effort. He has to know. "What happened to Jiang Cheng?"

"I don't know," Jin Ling whispers, voice muffled by Wei Wuxian's shoulder. Jin Ling is much taller than him, but he has his face buried in Wei Wuxian's shoulder as he cries. "No one knows," Jin Ling says. He pulls himself back, and wipes his face with his sleeve. Someone puts a handkerchief in his hands that he passes to Jin Ling who wipes his face once more and blows his nose. "He... he hasn't woken up in three weeks."

Wei Wuxian's knees buckle, but there are two pairs of arms holding him up.

"Wei Ying!" Lan Zhan says before glaring at Jin Ling as if blaming him.

"Dajiu!" Jin Ling's anxious eyes are on his face.

"I'm fine," Wei Wuxian mutters. "Let me just sit, Lan Zhan."

He sits on the floor, and rubs his face. "Tell me what you know, Jin Ling," he says.

Jin Ling talks, and Wei Wuxian tries to find a scrap of comfort in his words. Jiang Cheng is not dead, he is not cursed, his core is fine, his meridians are fine, he is healthy.

But he is not waking up, and has not for three weeks.

"Why did they wait three weeks before sending for you?" Wei Wuxian asks.

"Jiujiu's instructions in case of emergencies where he may end up incapacitated," Jin Ling says. "He has had this whole system in place for years. I guess he didn't want to leave his sect in shambles if something happened to him since he doesn't have any heirs." Jin Ling rubs his face as well, and Wei Wuxian can see the strain on the young man. "I am to be sent for if there has been no change for three weeks. You are to be sent for if his life is in imminent danger."

For just a moment, Wei Wuxian imagines such a message coming to Cloud Recesses and to his husband, as it usually does. What would Lan Zhan have done, he wonders. Wei Wuxian is reasonably certain that Lan Zhan won't keep any messages from him. But he is protective not only of his person, but of his heart as well, careful not to let anything near that may cause it pain.

Lan Zhan, his wonderful, loving husband who doesn't know that sometimes we all need that pain.

Wei Wuxian thinks that it's partly his own fault that he has never tried to tell Lan Zhan that neither Jiang Cheng nor Jin Ling will ever hurt him intentionally. That even if they do, he still wants to see them, that to be denied that is the thing that will hurt him. He has been so afraid of hurting Lan Zhan's feelings by being honest, and he has led things to such a pass that Lan Zhan has tried to prevent Jin Ling who came to him for help.

For Jiang Cheng.

“And they didn’t send for me because his life doesn’t appear to be in danger,” Wei Wuxian says.

Jin Ling nods, brushes tears from his eyes again, and his lips wobbled. “You will come, won’t you, Dajiu?” he asks, eyes wide and full of hope as well as fear.

Next to him, Lan Zhan shifts. “Wei Ying,” he says.

“I have to go, Lan Zhan,” he says, not looking at his husband. “If there’s anything I can do for him, I have to do it.”

“You don’t owe him anything,” Lan Zhan snarls.

“He’s my brother,” Wei Wuxian says. He hasn’t said those words in years, has not used that word to refer to Jiang Cheng since before he came back, but it’s time, he thinks. It’s time that he started trying to mend fences between his husband and his brother, because he loves them both, and he needs them both in his life. He swallows, hesitates, and says, “And I love him.”

Lan Zhan is silent, and Jin Ling snuffles. “I shall accompany you,” Lan Zhan says after a moment.

Wei Wuxian looks at his husband and gives him a smile, grateful beyond words, though he can’t say the words. Lan Zhan has never liked it when he says thank you, but he knows Lan Zhan will understand him even if he never says anything.

He turns to Jin Ling. “Give me a moment to change my robes, and we can leave.”

Jin Ling nods, expression relieved, but there is still the shadow of the same fear on his face that’s clutching Wei Wuxian’s heart. Wei Wuxian pats his nephew’s shoulder. “He’ll be fine, Jin Ling. I promise.”

He hopes, desperately that he’s right, that he can save his brother, whatever has happened to him.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Jiang Cheng reunites with his sister.

Kudos and comments keep me going, and if you don't want to miss updates, don't forget to subscribe!

Five

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng and Jiang Yanli reunites and there are sibling feels

Chapter Notes

Updates will happen a little more slowly in April as I have some urgent works till the 15th, but there will definitely be a weekly update

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Meishan is cold this time of the year, and the scars on his chest ache. Jiang Cheng ignores it as he nears his grandmother's home. Any moment now, he will be able to see his sister again. His heart is beating a wild rhythm in his chest, and he is both afraid and eager to see her. Afraid that she will see him and realise that he is not the brother she left behind in Lotus Pier. He isn't surprised that Wei Wuxian didn't realise it since they both had other things in mind, and Wei Wuxian was too relieved to have Jiang Cheng back.

A-Jie won't be as easy to fool as his brother. A-Jie knows him better than he knows himself, and even if he tells her everything that happened, she will still know this isn't her A-Cheng.

He hopes that enough things have changed already so that he won't have to see her die again, but the fear is always there. There is nothing he wants more than for his siblings to live, and be happy. He hopes that A-Jie will find happiness in this life as well, and that it won't be cut short again.

His grandmother greets him, hugs him, and asks what happened to him. Jiang Cheng tells her a heavily edited version, that Lotus Pier was sacked and burned by the Wens and that everyone is dead except him, Wei Wuxian and A-Jie. He tells her that he has come to take A-Jie to Qinghe since that is where they are headquartered right now.

She nods once. "You're fighting back against the Wens," she said.

"Yes," he confirmed.

"What do you need?" she asked.

"Wen Zhuliu crushed my golden core," he says baldly. "I need training to fight with regular weapons."

She looks away, her weathered face not showing any expression. “I assume that brat is going to be the next Sect Leader?” she asked, her voice neutral.

Jiang Cheng braces himself defiantly. “He has already been accepted as such.”

Both Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen has been surprisingly understanding, and equally accepting of Wei Wuxian as the next Sect Leader of YunmengJiang. The installation had happened in Qinghe the same day since both of them thought that having a Sect Leader for YunmengJiang, no matter how decimated the Sect was, would be good for the morale of the men. It would also help with recruitment, they had explained.

Jiang Cheng had spent the next two weeks healing fully from the injuries he sustained, and training with his brother. They used practice swords, and Wei Wuxian didn’t use any spiritual power, but Jiang Cheng was surprised that he could still do most of the YunmengJiang sword forms. The more advanced ones needed spiritual power, but he still counts it a victory.

The MeishanYu, unlike most other cultivation sects, relies on fighting skills that has nothing to do with spiritual powers. They also use unconventional weapons like whips. Jiang Cheng will never be able to use Zidian, but he wants to use a whip, and he wants to learn how to use one. Because of Zidian’s unique properties, he never had to do more than lash out with it, but he can see that an ordinary whip cannot be used that carelessly.

“I would need a whip,” he says.

She nods again, and asks, “What happened to your mother’s spiritual weapon? Is it with that brat?”

Jiang Cheng brings it out of his sleeve. “I want A-Jie to have it,” he says.

He had thought about it, and has realised that Zidian will not accept Wei Wuxian as its master. Its ownership, both physical and spiritual, had passed solely to him after his mother’s death, but despite the control he had once wielded over it, in this life he has held it only a handful of months. It will go to Wei Wuxian, but it will never fully obey him.

And Wei Wuxian isn’t interested in having the weapon that hurt him either.

Giving it to A-Jie will ensure her protection if a situation like Nightless City ever arose. Or at least, he hopes so.

His grandmother takes it from him, hands trembling. A drop of water splashes on to it, and Jiang Cheng realises that the old woman is crying. He moves without thinking, and hugs her. She clings to him, crying. They stay like that for a while.

“We heard,” she says when she can speak again. “About Lotus Pier. Your sister wanted to go back, but we couldn’t let her. She’s been distraught, unable to sleep, ever since.” She pats his back. “She’s resting now, wore herself out till she collapsed. She’ll be glad to see you, and to have this.”

He holds on to her and nods.

“We can have a weapon made for you,” she says. “One like Zidian, but one that uses your emotions rather than qi. A whip that will work just the same.”

He nods again. “I will still need training,” he says, his voice choked, raw.

“Stay here for three months,” she says. “Send a message to your Sect Leader and ask him if he can spare you.”

Three months. That has exactly been the time Wei Wuxian has been missing the last time. Worry knots his guts, chokes him. “One month,” he says.

Three months sounds like he is challenging the fates somehow.

The fighting will not start for another six weeks; they’re all still planning and recruiting, but he doesn’t want to stay away from Wei Wuxian for another three months.

Or have him dead another thirteen years.

Or have him walk away and only see him occasionally for another eight.

She looks displeased. “You will have time only for the basics in one month,” she says. “Everything you have learned till now is only useful to a cultivator. To change them, to adapt, to learn to fight without spiritual energy... that will take time.”

“We’re going to war,” he reminds her. “And I don’t want Wei Wuxian to be alone.”

“Foolish boy!” She shakes her head. “Why do you think I said three months? If not for the war, I would have asked you to stay for a year.”

A year.

Jiang Cheng knows objectively that he will not be of much use in the battlefield as he is, no matter how well trained he is. But he also knows that Wei Wuxian is new to his role, and will need his help. A-Jie will be there, of course, but both of them will need him. Their shared loss and pain are not something that others can understand.

Jiang Cheng makes a decision, and tells his grandmother, “One month.”

She sighs in defeat, but nods.

Further conversation is interrupted by a voice saying, “A-Cheng?” and he’s on his feet and turning to her before he became conscious of doing so.

She looks so young is his first thought.

Jin Ling looks more like her than I remembered is his second.

He goes towards her, crushing her in an embrace, and is not ashamed of the tears that soak the shoulder of her robes.

“A-Jie...” he says, unable to speak anymore.

“A-Cheng,” she says, but it is as heavy with grief as it is with love, but she holds him, rubs soothing circles on his back, and holds him.

He cannot stop looking at her, and he does it all day, follows her around, keeps touching her sleeve, her shoulder, reassuring himself that she is here, and real. He hugs her every now and then, calls her “A-Jie,” again and again just to say it.

I’ve missed you so much, he wants to say.

You left me for A-xian, he wants to say.

And then he too left me, he wants to say.

He says none of those things, just shadowing her all day, and cannot find the words to tell her everything he wants to. He gives her the same version that he gave his grandmother, because he cannot speak more than “A-Jie,” most of the time.

That night, he tosses and turns in his bed, unable to sleep, wanting to go to her, to see that she’s still alive, afraid to close his eyes lest he should find himself back in the time he had left behind, one where she is dead. It is only propriety and decorum and all that nonsense that makes him stay in his room. She is his sister, but they are no longer children to share a bed.

There is a light knock at his door. “A-Cheng?”

He is on his feet and at the door, sliding it open, “A-Jie?”

She smiles at him, and he can see that she has been crying. “I couldn’t sleep,” she says. “And I thought we could talk... We haven’t had much time to catch up today.”

They hadn’t, it is true. Jiang Cheng has been too overwhelmed by everything that he felt, still feels on seeing her like this, in front of him, alive again.

Nothing will stop his nightmares of holding her dying body in his arms in a battlefield, because that happened in his past too, but in this present, she is alive, and he will do everything he can do to keep her so.

This time, words are easier to come, and he tells her about what happened. He doesn’t tell her all the gory details, but doesn’t beat around the bush either. She weeps on hearing about their mother whipping Wei Wuxian, but it is his hands she takes, and it is to him she whispers, “There’s nothing you could have done, A-Cheng... there’s nothing any of us could have done.”

He wishes that he had been there then. Not the young him, but the him who had already lived through it. He could have called Zidian to him, and he knows that it would have come to him.

He tells her the rest, about the core melting hand, and about how their mother put them in a boat, bound them with Zidian and cursed Wei Wuxian again.

His voice doesn't falter when he comes to where he nearly throttled Wei Wuxian, blaming him for what happened.

"Oh, A-Cheng," she gathers him into her arms. "Oh, A-Cheng, it's all right. I'm sure A-xian understands that you were distraught. I'm sure he forgives you."

"I don't," he whispers. "It wasn't his fault... I just needed someone to blame."

"It wasn't your fault either," she says. "What you did... it isn't ideal, and we need to work on that temper of yours, A-Cheng, but... you were distressed and angry..." She holds him still. "Was it very bad?" she asks. "Seeing everyone like that?"

He still has nightmares about it even though it has been twenty-five years since that day. He nods, and she holds him tighter.

The rest of it is easier, and by the time he finishes, dawn is breaking, and its first pale fingers are making its way through the window, making redundant the candle that he had lit half a shichen ago.

They are both silent, except for their sobs, and she finally asks, "So, A-xian is the Sect Leader now?"

He nods. "I thought you wouldn't want it, considering everything."

She frowns, not pretending to misunderstand. "The engagement was broken," she says gently.

"It was, but... you still care for him, don't you?"

She nods.

"If you want to be Sect Leader, Wei Wuxian will of course, step down," he says. "I just don't like the idea of you having to sacrifice your chance of happiness for us."

For Wei Wuxian.

He doesn't think about the fact that he may be sacrificing Wei Wuxian's chance of happiness. After all, as a Sect Leader, he cannot marry out of the Sect, and Lan Wangji is as much a Sect Heir now as Jin Zixuan is.

Still, he thinks that Lan Xichen can have other heirs, that he didn't in their past doesn't mean he can't do it in the changed present. He can spare Lan Wangji, and if he knows anything of the man, he will because he loves his brother.

Jin Guangshan will never allow his only legitimate son and heir to marry out of the Sect. It doesn't matter how many other sons he has, since all of them are born on the wrong side of the sheets, and Jiang Cheng shudders at the thought of Jin Zixun becoming the next Jin Sect Leader.

He will ensure that Jin Zixuan will live a long and happy life with his A-Jie even if he has to kill everyone else to do it.

“Did it hurt?” she asks softly, and he knows she is asking about his golden core.

It hurt, but not as much as seeing you mourn your husband.

It hurt, but not as much as holding your dying body in my arms.

It hurt, but not as much as seeing him being torn apart by his own fierce corpses.

It hurt, but not as much as hearing what he did for me without my knowledge and pushed me away because of it.

It hurt, but not as much as seeing him walk away, after telling me to put it in the past.

“Yes,” he says quietly. “It hurt, but... it doesn’t matter now.” He smiles at her, and leans against her. “I have you and Wei Wuxian,” he says. “That’s all that matters.”

She smiles through her tears. “All right,” she says, kissing the top of his head that is resting on her shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Lan Wangji reflects on his sort of brother-in-law

Six

Chapter Summary

Lan Wangji has never liked Jiang Wanyin

Chapter Notes

So, I did a marathon editing session to fully edit this fic, and it will be updated daily now.

Thank you for everyone who read, commented, left kudos, bookmarked and subscribed. You are all the most wonderful readers ever!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Lan Wangji has never cared for Jiang Wanyin. Or more accurately, he has never cared for Jiang Wanyin apart from the three months that the two of them had worked together searching for Wei Ying at the beginning of the Sunshot campaign. Once Wei Ying had been found, he realised that Jiang Wanyin and he had completely different goals.

The man didn't care what demonic cultivation did to Wei Ying; only that he won the war for them. And Wei Ying had done that, filled himself with resentful energy, risked his life, his mind, his sanity to win the war for them.

And when the whole cultivation world turned against him, Jiang Wanyin had stood with them instead of with Wei Ying.

When Wei Ying needed help, Jiang Wanyin had kicked him out of his sect, denied him the protection of YunmengJiang that he deserved to have.

If Jiang Wanyin had helped him, helped the Wens, Wei Ying might never have died.

A-Yuan might never have lost his entire family.

Lan Wangji would not have had to mourn for thirteen years.

Xiongzhong wouldn't have needed to stand by and watch Lan Wangji being whipped.

It was all Jiang Wanyin's fault, because he was jealous and ungrateful, and cared more for his power and position than his brother. Wen Qing and Wen Ning had saved him and Wei Ying, kept them hidden from their enemies at risk to themselves, protected them. Jiang Wanyin

owed them, but instead of helping them when they needed it, he chose to turn his back on that debt, and leave them to the mercy of the Jins who wanted their blood.

He left Wei Ying to the mercy of the people who wanted him dead.

Such a man deserves no consideration from him, and no compassion.

Lan Wangji doesn't hate Jin Rulan. He understands why the young man should support Jiang Wanyin who after all, has brought him up. But that doesn't mean that Jin Rulan has the right to hurt Wei Ying.

Lan Wangji knows that Wei Ying's feelings for Jiang Wanyin are complicated and that his feelings for Jin Ling are also complicated. Wei Ying holds himself responsible for the death of Jin Rulan's parents and he had loved Jiang Yanli like his own sister, and she had loved him like her own brother too. His feelings for Jin Rulan are coloured by his guilt and that makes him careless enough that he lets Jin Rulan hurt him with his words, and his actions.

Lan Wangji remembers their last meeting when Jin Rulan had grabbed hold of Jiang Wanyin's hand, and said, "Let's go, Jiujiu, it's no use talking to them," and Wei Ying had looked so stricken, and had been miserable for days afterwards.

Lan Wangji knows that there are scars inside Wei Ying's heart that he cannot see, or heal because Wei Ying never allows anyone to see them. He doesn't even acknowledge that they exist in the first place. Wei Ying is careless with himself, and lets others hurt him over and over and laughs it off like it's nothing. That is why Wangji has to guard him against unkind words and the people who may hurt him with them.

All the same, Lan Wangji would never have tried to keep Jin Rulan from Wei Ying if he knew why the man was there. As much as he may hate Jiang Wanyin, he will not prevent Wei Ying from helping him. Except that it doesn't look to Lan Wangji that there's anything Wei Ying can actually do here. But Wei Ying has insisted, and so Lan Wangji must go with him, and protect him.

Besides, Wei Ying has called Jiang Wanyin his brother for the first time since he came back. Not his shidi, but his didi. He has also stated that he loves Jiang Wanyin, and Lan Wangji knows that if anything happens to the man, Wei Ying will be devastated. Lan Wangji may hate Jiang Wanyin, may consider him unworthy of Wei Ying's regard, but he will still help the man because Wei Ying loves him.

Wei Ying is too forgiving, but that is one of the things Lan Wangji loves about him. He will not change Wei Ying for the world, but he still wishes Wei Ying will be as careful with his own heart as he is with everyone else's.

When they reach Lotus Pier, it is already dark, and lanterns light up the walkways. The town is too quiet, and the flowing river and the sounds of the night are all he can hear. Lan Wangji had never been to Lotus Pier except for a handful of times when Xiongzhong had been in seclusion, and he cannot remember the place being so quiet any of those times.

Jiang Wanyin's second in command is waiting for them. "Jin Zongzhu," the man says though Lan Wangji knows for a certainty that the man has watched Jin Rulan grow up. "Wei gonzi, Hanguang Jun. If you can follow me."

This part of Lotus Pier is unfamiliar to him, but the smells of the healers' pavilion are unmistakeable. They are led into a room where Jiang Wanyin is lying on a bed, unnaturally still. If not for the rising and falling of his chest, and the colour on his face, one would have thought him dead. Wei Ying approaches the bed, and Lan Wangji follows.

Jiang Wanyin looks different. Without the ever-present scowl marring his features, he looks young, and vulnerable. The layers of purple fabric that he usually swathes himself in like armour are gone, and in their place are light purple inner robes. He is a far cry from the fearsome Sandu Shengshou, the scourge of demonic cultivators, the man who killed the Yiling Laozu.

He looks like the frightened young man Lan Wangji had met at the beginning of the Sunshot campaign, searching desperately for his brother, and afraid, so afraid of what he may find at the end of it. He had talked only of Wei Ying in those days, love and anger and fear, and hope all rolled into his words.

"He'll be fine," he used to say, staring into their pitiful campfire. "He always is... he has to be fine."

And Lan Wangji who had been equally afraid, had held on to his hope due to the tenuous hope in Jiang Wanyin's voice, had believed the man when he said Wei Ying will be all right, and safe because the alternative was unthinkable.

And that Jiang Wanyin had turned his back on Wei Ying when he had needed him the most, had turned against him, had killed him. Lan Wangji had seen Jiang Wanyin and Wei Ying fight together, a breathtaking display of power and skill where they both seemed instinctively aware of where each other was, and trusted each other to have their backs.

If Jiang Wanyin had stood with Wei Ying, Wei Ying's life would have been different. Jin Zixuan and Jiang Yanli wouldn't have died, Jin Ling wouldn't be an orphan. Lan Wangji hates that everyone blames Wei Ying while no one seems bothered about Jiang Wanyin's culpability. The man had seen the Wen remnants that Wei Ying had saved, had seen A-Yuan, and had not spoken up when the Jins claimed that the Wens were dangerous, that Wei Ying was seeking to raise an army to take over the cultivation world.

Jiang Wanyin was a sect leader. If he had spoken, if he had supported, others would have listened. No one would have dared harm Wei Ying who had only wanted to do the right thing, to protect the Wens who were innocent, the aged, the children.

And he had been killed in the end for that.

"Can I speak with the head healer?" Wei Ying asks, and Zhang Xiu nods.

Jin Rulan is sitting near his uncle, holding his hand in both of his, and tears are streaming down his face. Lan Wangji sits on one of the cushions on the floor and waits. He wants to

follow Wei Ying to the healer, but he knows that it is unnecessary. Wei Ying is safe here, and with Jin Rulan and Jiang Wanyin both in this room, there's no one who will say unkind things to Wei Ying.

He will wait for Wei Ying.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Reunion between siblings, and Jiang Cheng has a minor meltdown

Please leave a kudos or comment if you enjoy this!!

Seven

Chapter Summary

Reunions and trainings, and sibling bonding

Chapter Notes

A huge thanks to everyone who has read, commented, given kudos, bookmarked and subscribed. I can't tell you all how grateful I am.

Keep the love flowing!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

There are ten people from MeishanYu accompanying them when they leave. Not escorting them, and not there because their grandmother asked. They are there because Jiang Cheng asked if anyone would like to join the Jiang Sect and fight in the Sunshot.

We will have to find robes for them all, he thinks.

It had been a nightmare the last time. Getting new robes in Jiang colours had been an impossibility, and he remembers haggling with cloth merchants for anything purple. In the end, they had to make do with purple sashes and belts because there just wasn't enough fabric in the colour with Yunmeng still under the control of the Wens.

This time, he has some money that his grandmother has given, the new ring, Zihuo in his finger where Zidian once rested, and he haggles for anything purple with any cloth merchant they meet. His sister assists him, Zidian on her finger, but it feels strange to see it lie so inert. His own Zihuo emits purple sparks every now and then, but nothing has actually caught fire yet, so he counts that a win. Having no spiritual energy to control its transformation means he has to keep a tight rein on his temper to stop it from becoming a whip of purple fire and scaring everyone away or burning the shop they are in.

Sparks are fine though.

Sparks remind him of Zidian, and of how a baby Jin Ling was so fascinated by them whenever Jiang Cheng was about to lose his temper with someone, and Jin Ling cooing over a sparking Zidian had always caused Jiang Cheng's temper to cool, and for his heart to expand to a point where he feared it would leave his body. Of course, that meant that the

sparks stopped and then Jin Ling would start crying which gave Jiang Cheng an excuse to get out of whatever meeting or discussion he was having.

Jiang Cheng doesn't realise he is crying till his sister guides him out of the shop gently, but firmly and doesn't ask any questions.

Not that he could have answered anyway.

How is he to tell her that he's crying because he misses his nephew, the son she will have some day, the son she already had in his past, and left to his care when she chose to die to protect their brother?

He misses Jin Ling so, so much, but he wants to make sure that this time around, Jin Ling will have his parents to raise him. He will miss having Jin Ling all to himself, but he wants to have his siblings more than he wants to raise his nephew. He wants Jin Ling to have his parents, and maybe a few siblings.

Oh.

Jiang Cheng wants that so much. A few more nephews and nieces for him to spoil, to hear more voices that call him Jiujiu.

And maybe even one or two to call him Shufu.

He wants that badly for himself and for his siblings.

For all the time they take buying fabrics and recruiting rogue cultivators and people from some of the minor sects that the Wen nearly wiped out, they still arrive in the Unclean Realm ten days after they have started from Meishan, and Wei Wuxian is waiting for them, looking anxious. His face breaks into a relieved smile as he sees them and he runs to them, throwing his arms around both of them, and hugging them, and they end up in a three-way hug and a lot of tears.

Someone clears their throat, and they move apart, but slowly and reluctantly, as if afraid to let go, which in Jiang Cheng's case is a very real fear.

Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen are standing nearby with neutral expressions.

"Welcome back, Jiang Wanyin and Jiang guniang," Nie Mingjue says. "I see you've brought some companions."

Ah. Jiang Cheng had almost forgotten the people he had recruited. He introduces them to everyone, and introduces Wei Wuxian to them as their new Sect Leader. Wei Wuxian says that he has a few recruits himself and they all go to where the YunmengJiang disciples are staying.

Wei Wuxian looks at the ring on his finger, and gives him a questioning glance.

"This is Zihuo," Jiang Cheng says. "It channels my emotions, anger especially, so if I get angry, we get a fiery whip that burns a lot of things on sight."

“And I’ve been practising with Zidian,” A-Jie says. “A-Cheng is a good teacher, and even with my low spiritual energy, I can manage to use it without tiring for a shichen.”

“That’s great!” Wei Wuxian smiles, eyes as bright as his smile. “Are you going to fight then?”

A-Jie shakes her head, much to Jiang Cheng’s relief, and he can see that Wei Wuxian is as relieved as him. He had to ask that, though.

“I will work in the medical tents and the kitchen,” A-Jie says. “But it is good to have a means to protect myself if needed.”

Both of them nod, and then they are where the Jiang Sect disciples are quartered. The Yunmeng Jiang has exactly twenty-eight new disciples now. The ten from Meishan Yu, the eight that Jiang Cheng and A-Jie has recruited on their way back, and the ten that Wei Wuxian has recruited while they were away.

It’s not enough, not nearly enough, but it’s a start.

The disciples train together with Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng. They learn from each other, and the disciples from Meishan Yu help Jiang Cheng with his training. Sometimes, Nie Mingjue comes over and stands there, looking at them, a slight frown on his face. He never says anything.

Till the first time Jiang Cheng’s temper gets the best of him and Zihuo transforms into its true form, and destroys one of the practice dummies that were set up.

“What is that?” Nie Mingjue asks, his voice loud as he makes his way towards them. “What kind of weapon, I mean?”

“Nie Zongzhu,” Jiang Cheng’s face burns as he bows. “I apologise for my outburst.”

He was getting frustrated over a Meishan Yu form that he couldn’t yet master despite it needing no spiritual energy.

Nie Mingjue looks at the burning dummy, and shakes his head. “It can be replaced,” he says. “Show me that weapon, and how does it work?”

Jiang Cheng shows him the ring, and tells him that it needs heightened emotions to work. He has no idea how it is crafted, but it responds to anger quite readily. Also to fear and panic.

A-Jie had used Zidian to subdue him one night when he woke up from a nightmare with Zihuo already in whip form, and Wei Wuxian trying to calm him down. After that, he had started to keep the ring off when he went to bed.

“Interesting,” Nie Mingjue says, and the look on his face is familiar. Jiang Cheng had seen it so often during the Sunshot. Nie Mingjue is making plans on where he can be used the best. His eyes move over the rest of the YunmengJiang disciples whose numbers have swelled by another fifteen now. “How many of them can use whips?”

“All of them,” It is Wei Wuxian who answers.

Nie Mingjue nods. “You should join us this evening, Jiang Zongzhu,” he says to Wei Wuxian. “We will be finalising our plans.”

Wei Wuxian nods. “Jiang Cheng will also be joining us,” he says.

Nie Mingjue nods, face still scrunched up in thought. “We’ll be glad to have his input.”

He leaves and they all return to training. Jiang Cheng masters the sword form after another five tries, and doesn’t destroy any more dummies.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Lan Xichen doesn't want his brother to make a mistake.

If you enjoy this, please leave kudos or comments. They're literally my lifeblood

Eight

Chapter Summary

Lan Xichen just wants to stop his brother from getting hurt or hurting anyone else

Chapter Notes

Thank you for everyone who has been reading and commenting, leaving kudos, bookmarking and subscribing. You all rock.

I'm having a bad mental health day, but since this is already written and edited, I figured I'll post it.

I read every single comment, and I appreciate all of them!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Contrary to popular belief, Lan Xichen does not enjoy quiet or loneliness. That is why he left seclusion after just a year, because the loneliness was driving him crazy. He hadn't ready to take on duties at that time, and Wangji and Shufu had both understood. They had been too glad to see him out of seclusion, and since Xichen hadn't wanted to be disturbed, they hadn't let the wider cultivation world know that he was out of seclusion.

That situation had continued for another three years, and now Xichen feels that he had been excessive in that. Yet, he is able to do everything that is demanded of his position now. He had even started a tentative correspondence with Nie Huaisang a couple of years ago, and thought they will never be as comfortable as they once had been, they are at least talking openly. Xichen doesn't want to ignore Huaisang, doesn't want the man who he once considered a younger brother to be a stranger, but he isn't ready to trust either, not even after eight years.

He is satisfied with the progress they've been making, though.

The Cloud Recesses is quieter than most other places, but even it is never completely silent. Yet, in the absence of Wangji and his husband, there is a peculiar kind of quietude that steals over Cloud Recesses. Wei Wuxian's loud voice and laughter and Wangji's rare smiles are things Xichen misses now that they are absent.

There was a time Xichen had liked Wei Wuxian, a time when he had noticed his brother's fledgeling feelings for the Jiang's Head Disciple, and had encouraged it. And then came the

Sunshot campaign and its aftermath, and Wei Wuxian had become the enemy and then he had died, and Xichen had to watch as the skin was flayed from his brother's back by thirty-three strokes of the discipline whip for the crime of loving Wei Wuxian, of standing by his side, of fighting for him.

Xichen had hated Wei Wuxian then.

And then Wei Wuxian had returned, and Wangji's smiles had returned, and Xichen had liked the man again.

There is not much Xichen will not forgive for the sake of his little brother.

But throughout all this, he had never known Wei Wuxian personally nor tried to. But once he was married to Wangji and was living in the Cloud recesses, it had been impossible not to know him. Wei Wuxian is one of the best people Xichen has ever known, and he thinks he will always be deeply ashamed of his own part in the man's downfall and death. Wei Wuxian cares with all his heart, and yet cares nothing for the hurts he receives, has received. He is fiercely protective of Wangji, his life, his heart, his reputation, but is surprised when Wangji wants to protect him as well. He cares for Xichen because he is Wangji's brother, and is surprised when Xichen cares for him because he is Wangji's husband. He will throw himself into danger to save a total stranger, and will downplay any injury he has received so as not to worry anyone else.

Xichen understands Wangji's need to protect Wei Wuxian, even from his own family, but that is not to say he approves. Xichen has seen the tentative overtures Jiang Wanyin had made only for Wangji's intervention to cause the man to withdraw. Similar is the case with Jin Rulan, though Wangji usually doesn't interfere in Wei Wuxian's interactions with Jin Rulan as much as he does with Jiang Wanyin.

Yet, even he can see that Wangji has gone too far this time, and Jin Rulan's accusation, flung his way in anger, has hit harder than the young Sect leader might have expected.

"Are you his husband or his jailer?"

Jin Rulan doesn't know about their father, and therefore has no idea about the impact of his words on Wangji. All his life, Wangji had striven to not be like their father, choosing to break his heart over and over again rather than force Wei Wuxian to come to Gusu with him. Wangji had wanted to hide him away, but had never tried to forcibly do that. For him to be accused of being Wei Wuxian's jailer is quite literally the worst thing Jin Rulan could have said to him.

The only consolation is Wangji's nature does not lend itself to caring for what others think of him. The only exceptions are Wei Wuxian and him, and now Sizhui. Shufu had a place there once, but not for a while now.

Thirty-three strokes from a discipline whip will do that to you.

Xichen is lucky that his brother doesn't hold the same aversion for him, that even Wei Wuxian, as jealously protective of Wangji as Wangji is of him, doesn't hate Xichen for letting

Wangji be whipped like that.

Xichen won't lie and say he isn't worried. Jin Rulan and his rash words would not affect Wangji, but they will affect Wei Wuxian. Xichen knows that if the young man hadn't been so distraught, Wei Wuxian would have scolded him for speaking to Wangji like that. Jin Rulan doesn't know what those words may mean, but Wei Wuxian certainly does.

And that is why Xichen is worried.

He has watched Jin Rulan grow up, maybe not in the same way he has watched Sizhui grow up, but still, he has seen him throughout his life. He remembers Jin Guangyao speaking with exasperated fondness of how difficult it is to get A-Ling to leave Lotus Pier and come to Koi Tower every time. He remembers Jin Guangyao speaking with an exaggerated pout, eyes laughing, as he says, "Er-Ge, I have to content myself with being A-Ling's second favourite uncle. Jiang Zongzhu has me beaten so comprehensively."

Xichen has seen for himself, and known the truth of those words. One of his visits to Koi Tower had coincided with Jiang Wanyin coming to get his nephew, and he has seen how Jin Rulan's entire face lit up with joy and of how he had rushed to his uncle's side, shouting "Jiujiu!"

"Is this how you greet your elders, brat?" Jiang Wanyin had asked, his voice harsh, but his expression unspeakably soft. "Do you want me to break your legs?"

Jin Guangyao had leaned towards him, whispering conspiratorially. "He always threatens to break A-Ling's legs, but if a breeze hits A-Ling wrong, he will probably fight it."

Bile fills Xichen's mouth as he remembers Jin Guangyao holding a guqin string to Jin Rulan's throat under the very eyes of Jiang Wanyin.

Lan Xichen thinks that if Huaisang hadn't made him kill Jin Guangyao that day, Jiang Wanyin would have put an end to the man who had threatened his nephew.

And now, Jiang Wanyin was in danger, and Jin Rulan had come to get the help of the one person he trusts with his uncle. For Xichen knows that Jin Rulan didn't come because he thinks Wei Wuxian can help. He has come because he knows that there is no one else who can understand what it is to love Jiang Wanyin, and no one else who will understand what it might mean to lose him.

Wei Wuxian had once had his golden core cut out of his body and put inside Jiang Wanyin, and had lied about it. He had accepted Jiang Wanyin's anger, and hatred and had never once revealed a truth that might cause his brother guilt and heartbreak.

Xichen is worried because he knows that Wangji doesn't yet understand the depth of Wei Wuxian's devotion to Jiang Wanyin. Wangji knows Wei Wuxian, but he cannot know the things that Wei Wuxian will not show him, will not tell him, and Wei Wuxian has had a lifetime of practice in hiding things that are important to him.

Xichen doesn't think that Wei Wuxian will choose his brother over his husband, but he knows that being forced to choose will destroy him. And Wangji does not understand that, because he doesn't look at Jiang Wanyin and see Wei Wuxian's brother.

He only sees the man who abandoned his shixiong to fight the cultivation world alone.

What Wangji doesn't know, what even Wei Wuxian doesn't know yet, is that Jiang Wanyin loves Wei Wuxian as fiercely as he was said to have hated him once. That Jiang Wanyin understands that forcing a choice will destroy Wei Wuxian, and hence he has never pushed, has stepped back, allowed himself to be not a part of Wei Wuxian's life rather than be a disrupting factor in it.

Xichen suspects Jin Rulan knows this, but the boy will never say it because he dislikes and resents Wangji.

That is why Xichen is waiting for Shufu now. Because he wants to go to Lotus Pier, and to keep the peace between Wangji and Jin Rulan. To make sure that his cheerful, self-sacrificing brother-in-law will not be broken apart by his husband's stubborn love or his nephew's volatile one.

Lan Xichen has met Jiang Yanli only a few times, but has heard of how she stood in front of Wei Wuxian and demanded an apology from Jin Zixun on his behalf. Of how Madam Jin had tried to deescalate the situation by asking her to let go of such small things, and of how Jiang Yanli had stood there and said, "A-Xian is my younger brother. Him being humiliated by others, to me, isn't just a small matter."

Her son has inherited that fierce protectiveness that both her brothers also have in abundance. Jin Rulan will stop at nothing to protect Jiang Wanyin, and Xichen doesn't want his brother hurt by that protectiveness.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: The war has started, and Jiang Cheng cheats

Don't forget to leave a kudos or comment if you like this. Thank you all!!

Nine

Chapter Summary

In the midst of war, Jiang Cheng makes a decision to save someone else

Chapter Notes

I have no words for the overwhelming support and love for this fic. I was having a bad day, but every single comment made me smile.

Thank you all, for the love. Enjoy the new chapter!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

The war has no surprises for Jiang Cheng who is surprised at how good his memory is of the time. (He has never forgotten, he thinks. A part of him has always carried this with him, a weight he cannot shed, the weight of decisions, of dead bodies, of blood, of the memories of Hai Lan taking an arrow for Wei Wuxian, of A-Jie's soup) They take back their swords as in his past life, and then move their attention to the Jiangling front. They take back YunmengJiang in half the time that it took the last time, and it is rather strange to have Wei Wuxian listen to him. He does, though, arrays his forces as Jiang Cheng tells him to, and attacks where Jiang Cheng asks him to.

"I can't believe no one ever realised you were this good in strategy," Wei Wuxian says to him one evening. "It's like you can predict their moves before they make it."

Jiang Cheng shrugs. "It's not like they have a lot of options here," he says. "We just have to figure out which is more likely and after a couple of times, it's easier to predict how their mind works."

They find Wen Chao and Wen Zhuliu on the battlefield this time, and Jiang Cheng uses Zihuo to attack. He tells Wei Wuxian and the rest to distract, but never to come within the range of the Core Melting hand's attacks. They keep attacking Wen Chao and Wen Zhuliu has difficulty fending off so many. The Wen soldiers with them are already dead, and the Core Melting Hand is tiring.

Wei Wuxian gets a hit in, and disarms Wen Chao. Jiang Cheng has Wen Zhuliu engaged, and before the Core Melting hand can turn his attention to Wen Chao's scream, Wei Wuxian has cut his head off. The moment of Wen Zhuliu's distraction is enough for Zihuo to wrap around

his throat, and Jiang Cheng puts all his anger, and his fear into his weapon. Wen Zhuliu's head falls down, his neck still burning.

It is a quicker and cleaner death than either of them deserves, but they are dead, and Jiang Cheng is ready to be satisfied with that.

Wei Wuxian looks at him. "They got off too lightly," he says, his voice grim and eyes hard.

"It doesn't matter," Jiang Cheng says. "They're dead. That's all that matters."

They find Wang Lingjiao in the supervisory office, still alive, and bleeding out from a sword through her belly, and step over her. No one even looks at her as they take the place apart, and finds letters and documents and battle plans.

They also find Wen Ning and Wen Qing and take them prisoners.

That evening, Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian sit in Jiang Cheng's room and drink. A-Jie brings them soup and the three of them sit and hug each other after eating.

"Maybe A-Die and A-Niang will find peace now," Jiang Cheng whispers.

"They still got off too easy," Wei Wuxian says, his fists clenched. "They should have been captured and tortured and whipped raw for what they did to you!"

"A-Xian," A-Jie chides. "They are dead. Let's leave it at that."

"I hate them, Shijie," Wei Wuxian says and his voice breaks. "I hate them so much!"

And there is a look in his eyes, a haunted look, and Jiang Cheng knows that he is thinking back to the days in this exact same place when Jiang Cheng had just lain there wanting to die.

He reaches over A-Jie's shoulder and cuffs his brother on the back of his head. "Idiot," he says as his heart feels like it will burst. "I'm still here, aren't I?"

They hug again, the three of them clinging to each other.

"What are we doing with Wen Qing and Wen Ning?" Jiang Cheng asks.

"There is a great deal of hatred for the name Wen right now," Wei Wuxian says. "But we owe them, Jiang Cheng. Wen Ning saved you from Wen Chao and Wen Qing saved you with her skills. We cannot just forget that. Wen Ning also brought us Uncle Jiang and Madam Yu's bodies."

"In that case, they should be protected," A-Jie says. "They can assist me in the medic tents. If they change their robes and don't tell anyone who they are, everyone will think they're just two new recruits."

"We will have to swear to secrecy the ones who were with us when we took them prisoner," Wei Wuxian says.

“They’re all from Meishan Yu,” Jiang Cheng says. “We can tell them the truth, and they will keep our secret.”

Wen Ning and Wen Qing agree to the deception, and to introduce themselves as part of Meishan Yu if anyone asks.

Jiang Cheng asks Wen Qing if they have anyone else who they might want to keep safe, and she nods and tells them where to find them.

“They’re all civilians, it seems,” Jiang Cheng tells Wei Wuxian.

In his last life, he had allowed his hatred to dictate his actions, and had caused the death of those Wens who were innocent. They had been important to his brother, a family that he had chosen, and who had cared for him when his own could not, and he had repaid them with death.

This time, he wants to do better. He has lived long enough for the embers of his hatred for the Wens to die, and for regret to take its place.

“Then we will save them,” Wei Wuxian says, firmly. “We will take them in in groups of ten, assimilate them as part of our army, and settle them with the refugees in Lotus Pier.”

They had seen a few settlements where civilian refugees had taken shelter. The shopkeepers, innkeepers, tavern owners, boatmen, fishermen, lotus farmers and such who made up the bulk of Lotus Pier’s population and had escaped the carnage. The Wen hadn’t been as interested in the civilian population and had not hunted them down.

“Those who want, can help in the kitchens and medic tents too,” A-Jie says.

Jiang Cheng already feels lighter.

The war goes on, but things seem easier this time. Jiang Cheng thinks that the lesser time they needed this time is due to the fact that he didn’t have to find Wei Wuxian this time. Wei Wuxian is with him, and the YunmengJiang has over a hundred disciples by now.

Lan Wangji visits, but this time, there is no tension between him and Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng still doesn’t like the man who will one day become his brother-in-law, but he greets him politely. There is no friction between him and Lan Wangji in this life just as there is no temporary understanding born of a shared goal to find Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji is actually quite polite to him.

“How goes it in the other fronts?” Jiang Cheng asks, and learns that Nie Mingjue has a new deputy named Meng Yao, and that Lan Xichen is on the way to Hejian.

Jiang Cheng has almost no knowledge of what happened to Meng Yao after he left the Nie Sect and before he was revealed as the spy in Wen Ruohan’s palace. He is almost tempted to leave things alone. After all, there is no Stygian Tiger Seal in this life, and Wei Wuxian is not a demonic cultivator. There will be no Wen Remnants, and no reason for Jin Guangyao to strike against his brother or him.

Yet, he remembers that Chifeng Zun had started hating Meng Yao with a passion after the Sunshot campaign. He has attended enough discussion conferences with the two of them present to see that. He knows that Nie Mingjue's untimely death was brought about by Jin Guangyao.

He also remembers an uncle whom his nephew had been fond of, who had been kind, and caring. Who had smiled at him sincerely, had discussed Jin Ling's education with him, who had comforted Jin Ling after giving Suihua to him.

That man had not always been bad, he thinks.

He thinks that he should at least try and save Nie Mingjue, and if possible, Jin Guangyao too, though he isn't too hung up on the latter.

"Wei Wuxian," Jiang Cheng says. "Can you spare me for a few days?"

Wei Wuxian gives him a sharp glance, and nods. "You want to go to Hejian?"

Jiang Cheng nods too. "I will ask one of our disciples for a ride," he says.

"I will take you," Lan Wangji says. "I wish to see Xiongzhang, and I will return to Wei Ying after."

Jiang Cheng nods. "We'll leave in the morning then."

He says good bye to A-Jie, and tells her to stick close to Wei Wuxian. In the morning he bids goodbye to his brother.

"Remember what we discussed," he tells his brother. "I will be back by the time we reach Langya."

"I know," Wei Wuxian says, rolling his eyes, but he clutches Jiang Cheng's shoulders. "You'll be careful?"

Jiang Cheng nods. "I always am," he says. "Take care of A-Jie."

"With my life," Wei Wuxian says, and Jiang Cheng gives him a mock punch on the shoulder.

"What did we say about things like that?"

"I know," Wei Wuxian says, and speaks like one reciting a text, "I am Sect Leader now, and has responsibilities and shouldn't risk my life unnecessarily." His voice turns whining, "But Jiang Cheng, A-Jie's life *is* more important than mine!"

She thought the same, Jiang Cheng thinks. In the end she gave her life for you.

It should have been me, not her.

He pushes the past aside.

“Not more,” Jiang Cheng says, voice gruffer than usual, holding Wei Wuxian by his shoulders. “Equal. I need both of you, Wei Wuxian, so I better find both of you alive and well when I come to Langya.”

His brother nods, and they hug. Jiang Cheng sees that Lan Wangji doesn't look happy. He wants to scream suddenly because this may be a different Lan Wangji, but Jiang Cheng can still read his expressions. He had been forced to after Wei Wuxian had married the second Jade of Lan in his past life, because the man has apparently never learned the purpose of language.

Lan Wangji is jealous.

Because Jiang Cheng hugged Wei Wuxian.

What the fuck.

What the actual fuck.

Jiang Cheng wants to scream, but he manages a scowl instead as he approaches Lan Wangji. He hopes that the man won't drop him. After all, if he does, he will have to explain to Wei Wuxian how it happened. In this life, Jiang Cheng is confident enough in his brother and his affections to be sure that he will never forgive Lan Wangji if he lets Jiang Cheng fall. They mount Bichen and are off, Jiang Cheng remaining silently thoughtful.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Sizhui and his friends realise that Jin Ling may need them

Ten

Chapter Summary

Sizhui is patient and understanding

Chapter Notes

Soooo I decided to do a double updates of all my fics!! Enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Lan Sizhui has always been a patient man. He has always believed in showing respect and kindness to others, so when Jin Ling had left the night hunt that the four of them had been planning for ages, and had sent a butterfly saying he will not be able to return, Sizhui tries to understand. Jin Ling is theirs, but he is also the Sect leader of LanlingJin, and has responsibilities none of them, other than Zizhen, can even comprehend.

Even then, Zizhen's sect and LanlingJin are wholly different beasts, and even after eight years, Jin Ling still has to fight off the shadow of his predecessor. Sizhui understands this, and he is ready to swallow his own disappointment since he knows that Jin Ling wouldn't have abandoned them without sufficient cause.

Jingyi, it seems, is not that understanding. Sizhui understands he is disappointed. He is also upset, but he also knows that Jin Ling won't do it without good reason.

"The Young mistress is just showing off," Jingyi grumbles, pouting adorably. "He won't even tell us why he had to leave, or why he can't come back."

"I think maybe his uncle is hurt," Zizhen says, a faraway look on his handsome face. "That message he got was from Lotus Pier, not Koi Tower."

"Oh," Jingyi says, and that changes the mood drastically.

It makes sense that Zizhen should have known. He is also a Sect Leader now, and the BalingOuyang has always been closely tied to YunmengJiang. Ever since he took over his Sect, Zizhen's attitude towards Jin Ling's uncle had changed. Previously, he had seemed wary of the man, and had no strong opinions, but now it is as if he admired him deeply and is ready to call out anyone who dares say anything against the man. He doesn't get into fights like Jin Ling does, but he asks every politely for evidence of the words they had spoken, and explains with well-chosen words why their uninformed opinion is of no value to anyone.

Sizhui is frankly, a little bit scared of his two friends, and their protectiveness of Jiang Zongzhu who also scares him at times.

To be perfectly honest, Sizhui thinks that he and Jingyi will also challenge anyone who insults Jin Ling's uncle in their presence, and not least because he is Jin Ling's uncle.

The three of them have visited Lotus Pier very often, and while Jiang Zongzhu doesn't go out of his way to make them welcome, they have never felt unwelcome. They are quartered in a separate building with a private pavilion, and their privacy is always ensured.

Sizhui thinks that Jiang Zongzhu is either more observant than they give him credit for or they have not been as subtle as they believed.

"Should we go see how they're doing?" he asks now.

They've had a standing invitation to Lotus Pier ever since its master had noticed that they had befriended his nephew. Yet, it seems like a terrible imposition to take advantage of that if Jiang Zongzhu was injured or unwell, and Jin Ling may be too busy to attend to them. Yet, he cannot but be concerned, and he doesn't want Jin Ling to be alone.

"For him to just bail on us, it has to be serious," Jingyi says, a complete reversal of his earlier statements. "We maybe overstepping."

"If it is serious, he may need us," Zizhen says. "Even if he never says it or shows it like normal people do." He shakes his head. "His uncle is much better at it, but he never learns."

Sizhui cannot imagine that Jin Ling can be worse than the man who raised him, but he will bow to Zizhen's greater knowledge of the Jiang Sect Leader, and he cannot gainsay what Zizhen says about Jin Ling in any case.

"So, do we go or not?" he asks.

"We'll go," Jingyi says. "After all, Jiang Zongzhu himself told us that we can drop in any time, not to stand on ceremony, so it's not like we'll be breaking any societal etiquette. And even if Jiang Zongzhu is injured, it's not like we actually know that."

"And we've actually stayed in Lotus Pier when neither Jiang Zongzhu nor Jin Ling was there," Zizhen adds. "So, it's not a big deal."

He doesn't add that their stay in Lotus Pier at the time a Discussion Conference in the Unclean Realm had its master and nephew both absent was due to a night hunt gone wrong that had Jingyi nearly dead, and Lotus Pier has been the closest place with a healer. He doesn't say that they had stayed in the healers' pavilions with Jingyi, and that Jiang Zongzhu and Jin Ling had left the Conference half way through and returned to Lotus Pier when they heard what had happened. None of them talk of how Jiang Zongzhu had almost literally carried Zizhen and Sizhui from the infirmary and into a guest room and told them to rest.

Sizhui doesn't like the idea of Jiang Zongzhu being so badly injured that Jin Ling had to rush to him, or the thought of Jin Ling being alone at a time like this.

Jiang Zongzhu is my uncle too, and he even asked me to call him Shufu.

Sizhui hasn't started calling him that yet, but it makes him feel warm that the man asked. "We'll go to Lotus Pier," Sizhui decides.

The journey is more or less uneventful, and they reach Lotus Pier in the afternoon. There is something off about the place today, and it is only as the guards, who looks stressed, let them in that Sizhui can put a finger on it.

"Is it quieter here?"

"Than normal," Zizhen agrees.

Yet, disciples are training, and there seems to be nothing wrong as such. Zhang Xiu comes to greet them. The man looks tense, and there are shadows under his eyes.

"Ouyang Zongzhu," he greets. "Young masters Lan. Are you here for Jin Zongzhu?"

"We don't know what's happened," Zizhen says, "But we do know that Jin Ling teared out of our hunt in a hurry after a message from Lotus Pier reached him. You don't have to tell us anything, but we would like to be here, for Jin Ling, for whatever it is that we don't know and you're not telling us."

"Jin Zongzhu isn't here at the moment," he says. "He will be back, though. I will tell him you're here when he does. Please don't go looking for him. It may take a while for him to come to you."

"Do we have to stay in our rooms?" Sizhui asks.

Zhang Xiu shakes his head. "Zongzhu will have my hide if I ask you to do that. Just don't wander into the family residences or healers' pavilions or the kitchen," He fixes them with a glare. "We're still not over the last time the four of you were in the kitchen."

"Um," Jingyi who has been the architect of that mishap says. "No kitchen."

"I shall have your meals sent to the pavilion attached to your residence," he says. "If you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

"It is really serious, isn't it?" Jingyi mutters, sounding subdued as they make their way to their usual rooms. "He looks terrible."

They had seen Zhang Xiu face a horde of fierce corpses on a night hunt without turning a hair. One time when they visited Lotus Pier before the start of the monsoon, there had been a flash flood and Zhang Xiu had worked alongside his Sect Leader continuously without rest for three days, and hadn't looked as terrible as he did today. Sizhui can't help but worry, but Jiang Zongzhu and Jin Ling aren't all that he's worried about.

"Do you think Wei qianbei knows?" he asks as he opens the door to his usual room in Lotus Pier. It has been cleaned and aired recently, and there is a bath waiting, with water still hot.

“Maybe Jin Ling has gone to inform them?” Zizhen asks, as he sits on Sizhui’s bed. His larger than normal bed that had to have been specially commissioned. “I’ll have to send a message to my Sect that I’ll be delayed,” he says. “Excuse me.”

Sizhui can see that Zizhen is distracted as he leaves. He can’t blame them. He is worried about Jin Ling as well.

Jingyi has a frown on his face. “Do you think Jin Ling has gone to inform Wei qianbei?” he asks. “Because... why would he go himself when they can just send a message?”

Sizhui doesn’t know, and they don’t even know that Jin Ling has gone to get Wei qianbei, but if he has, then that means that whatever is wrong with Jiang Zongzhu is worse than they had imagined. Sizhui hopes they are wrong, though, and that Jin Ling has only gone to Koi Tower to delegate important Sect leader duties while he attends to his uncle here. He hopes that Jiang Zongzhu—Shufu, his heart yells at him—recovers quickly.

There’s a cold feeling that has clutched his heart, and Sizhui doesn’t know what to do with it. Jingyi mutters something about going to his room to bathe, and leaves, and Sizhui closes the door and sits down on the bed, and it feels like his heart is breaking, though he doesn’t know why.

Zizhen and Jingyi will be back soon, though. They never sleep in separate beds when they’re together. It’s not the same without Jin Ling, but if Jiang Zongzhu is not well, they shouldn’t be selfish.

The next time, I’ll call him Shufu for sure.

Sizhui hopes that someone thinks to inform Wei qianbei as well.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Jiang Cheng hopes he hasn't made a mess of things trying to help

Eleven

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng tries to help, interferes in some things, says a few things more than he should have and wins the respect of Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue. He just hopes he hasn't fucked up anything.

Chapter Notes

I am so grateful for all the amazing comments! Every single one makes me smile.

Thank you all!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Hanguang Jun meets his brother briefly before leaving, and Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen invite Jiang Cheng to join them in discussions.

“I understand that we have you to thank for how the tides have turned in the Jiangling front,” Nie Mingjue says.

“My brother exaggerates,” Jiang Cheng says with perfect equanimity. “All our decision were taken jointly.”

Nie Mingjue regards him sharply. “Even if it is an exaggeration, there is no denying that you have a head for strategy, and for understanding the heart of our enemies,” he says. “We could use more people like you.”

Jiang Cheng takes a sip of the tea placed on his table which he shares with Nie Mingjue, Meng Yao and Lan Xichen.

“My brother will be moving to Langya soon,” he says. “The Jin needs assistance there.” He doesn’t miss the way Meng Yao’s eyes flicker at his words. “I promised to join him and A-Jie at Langya. But in the meantime, I will be happy to help in any way that I can.”

Nie Mingjue’s eyes are assessing. “I would like to spar with you,” he says. “I will use no spiritual powers.”

Jiang Cheng is startled and he knows that it shows. But he has never been one to back down from a challenge. “All right,” he says. “When and where?”

“Tomorrow morning at the training grounds,” Nie Mingjue smiles at him.

“Ah, I definitely need to see this,” Lan Xichen says. “Even Wangji praises your skills, Jiang gonzi.”

Jiang Cheng promptly chokes on his tea. Hanguang Jun, that absolute asshole, has praised his skills?

“You seem astonished,” Lan Xichen says, smiling.

“I am,” Jiang Cheng admits. “I mean, Wei Wuxian saying something good about me is one thing, but Hanguang Jun?” He shakes his head.

“If Jiang Zongzhu says it,” Meng Yao says diffidently, “Why wouldn’t Jiang gonzi believe it?”

Jiang Cheng snorts. “He’s my brother,” he says simply. “It’s part of the job description to always praise each other to everyone else.”

Nie Mingjue laughs. “Even when you want to punch them in the face.”

Jiang Cheng chuckles. “I won’t ever believe that Nie-xiong actually makes you want to punch him in the face.”

Nie Mingjue just shakes his head. “I can’t say what I really think, so I will say that my brother is extremely talented in annoying me.”

“Maybe it should be Wei Wuxian here,” Jiang Cheng grins. “So, you older siblings can commiserate together about us younger ones.”

“I have no complaints about mine,” Lan Xichen says, a fond smile on his face. “Wangji is the best of brothers.”

Having come from a future where Hanguang Jun has done everything possible to support his brother during his seclusion, Jiang Cheng has to reluctantly agree that asshole that he is, Lan Wangji is still a good brother. Lan Xichen has emerged from seclusion just three or four years after he entered it, giving lie to the rumours that the man will end his life there, much as his father is reported to have done.

Looking at him now, a part of Jiang Cheng’s heart aches. Zewu Jun is one of those people who are too good in every life, and it would have been completely unfair and cruel if he had ended his life in seclusion. Jiang Cheng is glad that it didn’t happen, and that Lan Wangji supported him and helped him.

Still, in Jiang Cheng’s eyes, the best brother position is undoubtedly Nie Huaisang’s who made himself a laughing stock before the whole world so he can get revenge for his brother’s murder. For any man, even one with the least pride, to make himself so must sting much. Jiang Cheng doesn’t think he would have been able to do it.

He also sees the slightly wistful expression on Meng Yao's face as he listens to them talk about brothers. Jiang Cheng feels a wave of irritation as well as pity. How did this man go from someone who seems to genuinely want to have a brother to someone who tried to have that brother killed? The peacock is not the warmest of personalities, and doesn't have any idea how to normally interact with other people, but he's still a good person, and capable of loving and being loyal.

By and by, the hall empties, and Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen discuss Nie Huaisang, and Meng Yao shows them all to where they will rest. Since it is still a battlefield, they are all sleeping in tents. Lan Xichen and Jiang Cheng are taken to what Jiang Cheng takes to be Nie Mingjue's own sleeping tent. There are three beds inside, and Nie Mingjue leaves the three of them to go outside.

Lan Xichen and Meng Yao talk like old friends, and Lan Xichen asks Meng Yao about his desire to make his place in LanlingJin someday and if he still wishes it, and Meng Yao affirms it. Jiang Cheng knocks over a water pitcher on to his bed, trusting that the other two men will be engrossed enough in their conversation that they won't notice the act and will take it for an accident.

Meng Yao immediately comes over, and refuses to accept Jiang Cheng's apologies and assurances that he will be fine, that he doesn't need a bed, and leaves with the wet bedding, promising to bring a new one immediately. Nie Mingjue comes inside just as he is leaving, and tells Meng Yao not to bother with a new bed since Jiang gonzi is not bothered about sleeping on the ground, and there are enough sheets in the other two beds.

"Da-Ge, why did you say Jiang-gonzi will be comfortable on the ground?" Lan Xichen asks once Meng Yao leaves. Jiang Cheng has a feeling that the man will give up his own bed if he feels Jiang Cheng will be uncomfortable. Lan Xichen is one of the truly pure souls Jiang Cheng has ever known.

"I saw him knock over that pitcher," Nie Mingjue says, as Jiang Cheng places some of Wei Wuxian's privacy talismans on the walls of the tent, and a talisman that his brother had developed recently that will alert him if anyone approaches the tent. "You did it deliberately."

"I did," Jiang Cheng agrees.

"Why?" Lan Xichen asks, his voice cold.

"Because I wanted him out of the room," Jiang Cheng says, and he sits down on the ground. "I have something to say to the two of you, and you need to listen."

"Meng Yao is trustworthy," Chifeng Zun growls.

"I know," Jiang Cheng says, still calm. "But this is something that is best said out of his earshot."

"All right," Lan Xichen says. "What is it?"

Jiang Cheng takes a moment to gather his thoughts. "When our father brought Wei Wuxian home," he says, "my mother was not happy. Oftentimes, she would berate him for no reason, and fight with my father over what she saw as his favouritism towards Wei Wuxian. Please," Jiang Cheng says as Nie Mingjue opens his mouth to say something. "Hear me out." He pauses, twisting Zihuo on his finger.

"When the Wen first came to Lotus Pier, they demanded that Wei Wuxian be punished. My mother whipped him with Zidian while her maids held me down so I wouldn't intervene. When I somehow threw them off and went to him, he pushed me away and told me not to interfere, to let her punish him if that would appease the Wen." He clenched his fist. "The last thing she said to him was to protect me with his life. The last thing my father said to him was to take care of me. And when I lost my core... I was despondent... I didn't get up from the bed, I didn't eat, and Wei Wuxian... he found this experimental treatise where someone speculated on how a person whose core has been crushed by Wen Zhuliu can get a new one if someone donates their core to them within a set period of time. There was only a fifty percent chance of success, but he was still ready to do it, till I came to my senses and dragged him to the Unclean Realm." He blinks, surprised that his eyes are wet.

"My father brought him home when he was nine, and he grew up with us. Even then, he was made to feel less, to feel that he has to sacrifice himself to keep us, to keep *me* safe." He pauses, and says, "Meng Yao has already been rejected by his father once. Madam Jin and my mother were friends, and I know her well. She will never accept him. How do you think he will be treated even if Jin Zongzhu accepts him into his household?"

Lan Xichen's face has a strange expression on his face.

Nie Mingjue looks thoughtful. "You're saying that even if he wishes to go to Langya, I should keep him here?"

"If you send him to Langya, don't send him to his father," Jiang Cheng says. "Send him to his brother. Jin Zixuan may be the only person who can help him. Madam Jin dotes on him, and Jin Zongzhu may listen to him more readily than to anyone else." He draws a deep breath. "And if the two of you care for him, as it is evident that you do, assure him that whatever happens with the Jin, he has a place here. Wei Wuxian had to put up with things no one should have had to put up with because he had nowhere else to go. A-Jie and I tried our best to help him, but our mother wasn't the type to listen to anyone. Make sure that Meng Yao knows he has a place to go to and people who looks out for him if he is ill-treated."

Nie Mingjue nods. "Take my bed," he says decisively. "There's a spare bed in Meng Yao's tent. I will ask him what he wants, and if he wants to go to Langya, I will send him to his brother."

"Chifeng Zun," Jiang Cheng says. "You know I'm also planning to go to Langya. Meng Yao and I can travel together. I shall introduce him to Jin Zixuan, and see that he is treated well, and if he isn't I shall let you know." He pauses. "I know I don't have to say this, but—"

"What you told us will not leave this tent," Lan Xichen says sincerely, and Nie Mingjue nods as well. Jiang Cheng is relieved. At this point, he has done what he can to help Meng Yao,

and if the man still turns into what he once was, he will just have to kill him before he does any damage.

“Thank you, Jiang gonzi,” Nie Mingjue says with sincere gratitude before leaving.

Jiang Cheng gets up from the ground and sits down on the bed and takes off Zihuo, and keeps it on top of his outer robes.

“You are not afraid of losing it?” Lan Xichen asks.

“No one else can use it,” Jiang Cheng shrugs. “I have nightmares, and the ring reacts to my fear and panic if it’s on my finger.”

Lan Xichen looks at the privacy talismans. “I see.”

“If you hear me screaming or something, just ignore it,” Jiang Cheng says.

“Shouldn’t I wake you?”

“Not unless you’re looking to be punched or throttled,” Jiang Cheng says. “It’ll pass, Zewu Jun. Best to let it be.”

Lan Xichen puts out the candle and they both lie down.

“You seem to care for Jiang Zongzhu a lot,” Lan Xichen says after a while.

“He’s my brother,” Jiang Cheng states. “No matter what my mother might have thought, he is my brother. We may not be related by blood, but he is still my brother. I just have to ensure that he doesn’t do stupid things trying to protect me.”

“You’re a good brother,” Lan Xichen says softly, and then even more softly, “He would have given you his golden core?”

“And would probably never have told me about it either,” he says, chuckling. “I’m glad it never came to that.”

“You truly mean it,” Lan Xichen says, sounding baffled.

“Zewu Jun,” Jiang Cheng says. “If you have to make a choice between your cultivation and your brother, what would you choose? Is it so difficult a choice?”

“No,” Lan Xichen breathes. “Not for any one of us, it seems.”

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Ouyang Zizhen may have heard something not meant for his ears.

Don't forget to leave a comment if you enjoyed this!

Twelve

Chapter Summary

Ouyang Zizhen is not stupid, and is able to put things together, and to make himself heard as well

Chapter Notes

I am bowled over by all the comments to the last chapter. I know that JGY can't be JC's favourite person, but also JGY and JC raised JL together for a while, so JC can't be like fully indifferent to his fate, and it has been eight years now, giving him time to think, and he's been able to at least understand that once JGY started going down that road, he's really had no other option than to keep going or risk being shamed and ridiculed if not outright killed if he stopped. And he can't help but think that of the parallels between WWX's situation and JGY's and he's hoping that JZX is basically still the man he remembers as his brother-in-law.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Zizhen never expects that he will be the first one to learn what happened to Sect Leader Jiang. He hadn't meant to pry, but one of the disciples had shown him into Sect Leader Jiang's office so he can write to his second in command, and inform him he will be delayed by a few days. He sands and seals the letter, and hands it over to the same disciple, and is leaving the office when he sees Wei qianbei standing to a side in what looks like a heated altercation with the chief healer.

Zhou Lai looks more harried than Zizhen has ever seen her, and he can't see Wei qianbei's face, but he is gesticulating wildly as he tends to do when he's agitated. Zizhen moves towards the two, making no attempt to be stealthy, but the two are too involved in their conversation to notice him. Words reach him when he's almost upon them, and he halts without it being a conscious decision.

"There has to be something we can do!" Wei qianbei has never sounded this desperate.

"I understand that you're upset, Wei gonzi," Zhou Lai says, but there is an edge of impatience to her voice. "But repeating the same things are not going to help Zongzhu. You getting upset over facts don't do anything to help." She pauses, and her face hardens. "You're not the only one here who cares about Zongzhu, if you ever even did."

Wei qianbei visibly stills. "What is that supposed to mean?"

“Ask yourself who was here for him all these years, and who was not,” Zhou Lai says. “Eight years since you returned Wei gonzi, and you never once stepped foot in Lotus Pier, never once asked about how Zongzhu is doing. Maybe you have reason enough to hate him, but if that is so, you don’t get to come in here and pretend that you care just because you can’t find a quick fix to this.” Her eyes are cold. “You and your husband can go back if you don’t want to stay. Zhang Xiu and Jin Zongzhu made the decision to bring you. I was not consulted, and if I was, I would have told them not to.” She turns her face away. “I don’t care what you think you did for him; I only care about what you did *to* him, before and after your death. Now, I’ve already given you my assessment of his condition. There’s little I or any healer can do for him.”

Zizhen clears his throat loudly, and both of them turn to look at him.

“I heard raised voices,” he says, to cover his shock at seeing just how stricken Wei qianbei looks. “Um, we came to see Jin Ling, and I had to send a message to my Sect to let them know I will be delayed, and I was leaving the office when I heard raised voices and—” Zizhen took a deep breath and ploughed on. “What’s wrong with Jin Ling’s uncle?”

He hopes that his wording conveys the fact that this is Jin Ling’s friend asking about his uncle and not the Sect Leader of BalingOuyang asking about the Sect Leader of YunmengJiang.

“You should go back to your rooms, Ouyang Zongzhu,” Zhou Lai says, though her face has softened to its normal lines. She is so gentle usually that Zizhen still can’t wrap his head around the fact that this woman had literally just eviscerated Wei qianbei with her words. “Jin Zongzhu and Jiang Zongzhu are not going to be able to attend to you.”

She turns to Wei qianbei. “There are rooms prepared in the guest residences for you and your husband,” she says. “If you follow Ouyang Zongzhu, he should be able to show you the way.”

Zizhen is amused at the way she uses his title but still uses him to show Wei qianbei his place in Lotus Pier.

You’re an outsider now, her words imply. Even a visiting Sect Leader from a minor Sect belongs here more than you do.

Wei qianbei’s lips twist in a strange smile as he dips his shoulders in a bow. “If you can wait here, Ouyang Zongzhu,” he says, “I have to collect my husband from the healers’ pavilions.”

“Bring Jin Zongzhu too,” Zhou Lai says. “It’s not like him being there helps. Tell him to get some rest.”

Once Wei qianbei leaves, Zhou Lai’s shoulders relax. “How much did you hear?”

“I heard you tear into him,” Zizhen says neutrally. “What is wrong with Jiang Zongzhu? He’s not... is he dying?”

“No,” she says. “I think he’s been cursed, but... the symptoms don’t track, and...” she sighs. “Maybe that man can help, but I don’t get the feeling that he wants to take the effort. It’s like he has just danced in here, expecting to find a quick fix and go back to his life the next day.”

Zizhen doesn’t want to get into the rights and wrongs of it, but he thinks that if the healers can’t do anything for Jiang Zongzhu, perhaps she shouldn’t be trying to drive away the one person who may be able to. Some of it may have shown on his face, for she scowls.

“If he leaves now, he will only have proved me right,” she says, her face colouring.

Zizhen finds his words at that. “Is being proved right more important than helping Jiang Zongzhu?”

She scowls even more fiercely, her face red. “No, but if I’m right, then he’s not going to help anyway, and if I’m wrong, I’m ready to kneel down and apologise.”

Wei qianbei appears with Hanguang Jun and Jin Ling preventing Zizhen from having to make any response.

“Jin Zongzhu,” Zhou Lai says. “I will stay with him tonight. You should rest.”

Zizhen knows Jin Ling won’t get any rest, but he refrains from pointing it out. Zhou Lai has completely ignored Hanguang Jun, and Zizhen is sick of people just thinking they can forget all rules of courtesy just because they don’t like someone.

Jiang Zongzhu has always greeted people properly, using their courtesy names or titles, even when it’s people he doesn’t like.

So, he greets Wei qianbei and Hanguang Jun and even Jin Ling who eyes him suspiciously. They lead the way to the two seniors, and Zizhen can see that Jin Ling looks terrible. He has been crying, and there is so much grief in his eyes that Zizhen can feel himself tearing up a little.

“Jingyi and Sizhui are here too,” he says quietly. “In our usual rooms. Want to join us for dinner?”

Jin Ling’s gaze flits behind them to where the two men are walking, conversing in low tones. “No,” Jin Ling says, eyes ahead again. “I’m not hungry anyway.”

“All right,” Zizhen says. “Then how about you and I have dinner in my room? Sizhui and Jingyi can keep those two occupied.”

Jin Ling nods. “All right. I’ll tell the kitchens accordingly.”

“Do you want to sleep in my room tonight?” Zizhen asks.

Jin Ling has never been the best at sleeping through the night, as Zizhen, and the others too, know from various night hunts. It’s especially worse after something happens to upset him, but they had discovered that Jin Ling sleeps better when there’s someone else in the bed with him. He thinks sharing a bed for Jin Ling’s sake is how this all started for them in the first

place. Not that they hadn't had feelings before. When they had first offered to share a bed, Jin Ling has been embarrassed, but he hadn't turned down their help either.

Yet, he hesitates now, though none of them had ever slept alone when they were under the same roof.

Zizhen says, "You need to sleep if you are to stay with your uncle during the day."

That seems to decide Jin Ling and he nods. "All right then. Thank you." He stops as they reach the walkway leading to the family residences. "I'll join you after a bath. You will show them to the guest quarters?"

"Of course," Zizhen smiles. "What are friends for?"

They still don't have a name for what they are to one another, and so they must confine to being called friends.

Jin Ling turns to bow to the other two, before leaving, and Zizhen smiles at them. "If you can follow me," he says.

Wei qianbei and Hanguang Jun walk beside him however. The walkway is wide enough, and well-lit with lotus shaped lanterns, so there's no difficulty.

"You and Jin Ling seem close," Wei qianbei says.

"You know we night hunt together all the time," Zizhen says, surprised. It occurs to him that Wei qianbei must have heard the bed comment. "Oh, you mean about the bed? It's just he sleeps better if someone's in the bed with him, otherwise he'll just toss and turn all night. We think it's because he's been used to sleeping with Fairy since he was a child, but well, he's gone now, and Jin Ling has another dog, but he doesn't bring him on night hunts if he's anywhere near Yunmeng or Gusu. Everyone knows dogs aren't allowed in Lotus Pier. Jiang Zongzhu made an exception for Fairy because Jin Ling was a child, but obviously he isn't going to allow that anymore."

He knows he is rambling, but he can't stop. He hopes he isn't giving them away because none of them are ready to let anyone know, and Wei qianbei is literally the worst possible option.

"Ha," Wei qianbei gives an uncertain laugh. "You seem very familiar with Lotus Pier."

"Oh, we've had a standing invitation to visit ever since Jiang Zongzhu realised that we night hunted with Jin Ling all the time. Besides, BalingOuyang and YunmengJiang has always been close, and Jiang Zongzhu has always been ready to help me with advice or anything else I may need."

"Has he been happy?" Wei qianbei sounds hesitant as he asks the question.

For just a moment, Zizhen feels anger, and a desire to shout. If he is so concerned, he could have come and seen for himself, after all. Then he reminds himself that this is Wei qianbei

and Jiang Zongzhu and that he has been determined for a long time now not to get embroiled in anything between them as Jin Ling frequently did.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen him happy as such,” Zizhen says, and doesn’t miss the flash of pain in Wei qianbei’s eyes. “I think it’s unfair to expect someone who’s been through as much as he has to be actually happy,” Zizhen continues. “But... he is content, I think, and quite happier when Jin Ling is here, and when we come to visit too, if he’s here.”

“You’ve visited him when he’s not here?” Wei qianbei sounds astonished.

“I wouldn’t call it a *visit*,” Zizhen shrugged as he narrated about that time. “Anyway, when we left that time, he told us that we shouldn’t be worried even if he wasn’t there, that his disciples know to let us in and to give us any assistance we may require.”

Wei qianbei looks surprised, and Hanguang Jun looks as stoic as ever. Zizhen wonders if he will ever be able to read the older man. He respects Hanguang Jun, and he has actual awe and admiration for his steadfast devotion to Wei qianbei—he wore mourning clothes all the time Wei qianbei was dead, and raised his son, and it’s so romantic that Zizhen is ready to swoon—and he will never say it out loud because it can hurt Sizhui, but he *likes* the first Jade of Lan more. Zewu Jun has actual expressions on his face, despite how similar the two brothers look. In addition, Zewu Jun is as helpful as Jiang Zongzhu, and a good Sect Leader too.

Maybe it is being a Sect Leader himself that has made Zizhen sympathise with Jiang Zongzhu and the terrible choices that he had been forced to make for his sect, and for his people.

“We’re here,” he says, leading them to a guest residence that is different from the one he and his friends are staying in.

He is grateful for that. He has heard enough stories from Jingyi and Sizhui to not want to be anywhere near those two when they are alone. And he doesn’t want them anywhere near where they’re staying either despite the fact that they have locking and privacy talismans. He can hope that Wei qianbei may be anxious enough about Jiang Zongzhu to bother them, but he isn’t ready to lay any wagers on that.

A separate residence gives all of them their much-needed privacy.

He is determined to get the truth about Jiang Zongzhu out of Jin Ling when he comes for dinner, because how can he help Jin Ling if he doesn’t know what’s going on?

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Jiang Cheng and Meng Yao has a conversation, and Jiang Cheng once again hopes that he hasn't fucked things up

Thirteen

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng and Meng Yao go to Langya, have a conversation en route and Jiang Cheng hopes that he's really not screwing things up for everyone

Chapter Notes

I am still blown away by all the love this work continues to get. My mental health is not the best these days, but you all still make me smile

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

The stay in Hejian is mostly uneventful. Jiang Cheng is able to help Nie Mingjue somewhat, but his familiarity with the battlefield of Hejian is not as extensive as that of the Jiangling front. Last time, he knows that Meng Yao's spying brought them some huge advantages, but this time that avenue is not open to them. Fortunately for Jiang Cheng, though he has no first-hand knowledge of the battles and of everything else that transpired, there are enough records of the war that he has studied that he is familiar enough with the events, and the crucial battles.

By the time he receives a message from Wei Wuxian brought by a polite but distant Hanguang Jun, they are closer than ever to Qishan. Jiang Cheng knows that Nie Mingjue is captured in Yangquan, but has no ideas on how to stop it. He has promised Wei Wuxian that he will join him in Langya, and Jiang Cheng doesn't want them to break promises in this life.

"Chifeng Zun," he says. "I have to return to my brother now."

"Meng Yao shall come with you," Nie Mingjue says. "I've written a personal letter of recommendation directed to his brother."

Meng Yao does look happy, and nervous at the same time.

"Chifeng Zun," Jiang Cheng says, "Can I have a private word with you before we leave?"

Nie Mingjue frowns but nods and the room empties. Jiang Cheng waits till they are alone before applying privacy talismans.

"You know that my brother and I were saved by a couple of Wens after the attack on Lotus Pier," Jiang Cheng says.

Nie Mingjue's face darkened. "I remember," he says.

"When this war is over," Jiang Cheng says, "Wei Wuxian and I intend to protect them in return for saving our lives and for returning our parents' bodies to us."

Nie Mingjue's brows contracted. "And why are you telling me this?"

"Just so you wouldn't give me grief over it later," Jiang Cheng says. "I know you hate the Wens; so do I. I lost my parents, my sect and my golden core to them." He holds the other man's eyes. "And yet, I would protect these two with everything I have, and so would my brother. We will not repay kindness with cruelty, Chifeng Zun. We didn't fight this war so we can turn into the Wens, and hurt innocents just because they have the wrong name."

Nie Mingjue's frown deepened, but he nodded. "You make a good point, Jiang Wanyin," he mutters. "Very well, I shall stand by you if you wish to protect the Wens who are not directly involved in the war, and I know Xichen will too."

"There's one more thing," Jiang Cheng says. "We retrieved some documents from the Yiling Supervisory office where Wen Chao was. Some of them were in code, but Wei Wuxian has managed to crack them now. There is going to be an ambush at Yangquan. If you must go through there, go in strength, not stealth. Let Wen Ruohan see you and your army come. But only when you can be sure that your allies from Langya will also reach you in time."

Nie Mingjue's expression clears, and surprise shines in his eyes. "I find myself constantly surprised by you and your brother, Jiang Wanyin," he says. "I'm glad to have had this opportunity to work alongside you." He smiles. "I shall miss our daily spars as well. Take care of Meng Yao for me."

Jiang Cheng wonders if Nie Mingjue even noticed the incongruity of asking a civilian to take care of a cultivator. But then, it is very evident that Nie Mingjue holds Meng Yao in high regard.

He hopes that nothing will change that in this life. Either way, Jiang Cheng is resolved to end Jin Guangshan as soon as the war ends, and he hopes that by that time Meng Yao will be someone different than in his last life.

They travel by Meng Yao's sword, but take frequent breaks since Meng Yao's cultivation isn't strong enough to sustain such a long flight.

After the man apologises for the third time, Jiang Cheng has had enough.

"Meng gonzi," he says. "I have already told you there is no need to apologise to me. This isn't something you can help. Would you like it if I apologise to you for having to carry me with you? Without me, you can make better progress, so shouldn't it be me who should apologise to you?"

Meng Yao stares at him, eyes wide in shock. He is so different from the man in Jiang Cheng's memories, the smooth faced man with ready smiles who would speak to A-Ling with such seriousness, and who always seemed pleased to see him at Koi Tower, and who was ready to

sit down and discuss their shared nephew and his education and training despite the demands on his time. Jiang Cheng still has difficulty reconciling that man with the one in Guanyin temple who had mocked him, and held a guqin string to Jin Ling's throat. That scar is now faded, but it had been stark for months. It isn't gone, but barely remarkable now.

(There is a similar scar on Wei Wuxian's neck, and Jiang Cheng hadn't asked about it even once. That one took almost three years to fade. Again, not fully gone.)

The man standing before him, his hair still in Nie braids, and dressed in Nie colours, with a blush on his cheeks and gratitude in his eyes is entirely different from those two.

"Jiang gonzi is right," Meng Yao says. "This one shall try not to apologise."

"Please don't refer to yourself that way, Meng gonzi," Jiang Cheng says. "I am not even a cultivator now. Why should you even defer to me now?"

Meng Yao's sharp gaze searches his face. "How do you do it?" he asks suddenly. "You... you should have been the Sect Leader, but now..." His blush deepens. "If I have offended Jiang gonzi..."

"You haven't," Jiang Cheng says. "The answer is simple, Meng Yao. If I gave up, I'm letting those who did this to me win. I'm letting down my siblings whose love for me is not conditional on my cultivation. I'm being unfilial to my parents who would expect me to take revenge on their murderers. I am being a traitor to my Sect when our motto exhorts us to attempt the impossible."

Meng Yao nods slowly. "So, you don't miss it?"

"I do," Jiang Cheng says. "Every day, every moment, but I also remind myself that I don't need it to live, to be happy. I have my family, and my Sect, and that is enough."

Meng Yao just stares at him. "How can that even be?" he asks.

"I am not saying it is easy or even doable for everyone," Jiang Cheng says quietly. "But being angry or sad or any of the things are not going to bring back my core. There is nothing I can do but move forward, and do what I can to support my brother. He needs me, and... and that means a great deal."

Because in their past life, Wei Wuxian has never needed him. It was always the other way around. But now, Wei Wuxian needs him and A-Jie, both. His father might have taught his son and his first disciple equally, but Jiang Cheng has almost thirty years of experience in running a sect, of building it from the ground up, and even though Wei Wuxian doesn't know that, he has seen that Jiang Cheng knows how to do things more than him.

It may not last, Jiang Cheng knows. The war is taking all his brother's attention right now, but once it is over, Wei Wuxian will have time to deal with Sect matters, and there has literally been nothing Wei Wuxian couldn't learn when he put his mind to it.

“I’ve heard stories,” Meng Yao says, hesitant even as he probed. “That your father showed favouritism to him.”

“Both my parents compared me and him, and found me lacking,” Jiang Cheng says casually, carelessly despite the pain it still brought him. “I think my father thought I was more Yu than Jiang, and my mother just wanted me to be better than him.” He smiles suddenly. “As if that is even possible. No matter how hard I tried, even if I still had my cultivation, I still wouldn’t be as good as him.”

Meng Yao looks flabbergasted. “Why do you say that?” he asks.

“Meng gonzi,” Jiang Cheng says. “When I was in the Hejian front, I heard it said that you have such a good memory that you can recollect something even if you have seen it only once. Is that right?”

Meng Yao nodded.

“And I wager that it is a skill that you had from childhood, that you didn’t have to train yourself to be like that.”

“That’s right,” Meng Yao said.

Jiang Cheng leaned forward. “But if someone else wants to do it, they will have to train themselves for months, maybe even years, and yet they may not be as good as you who do it without any effort at all, because it is something that’s a part of you, an innate talent.” He smiles at the other man. “That’s the difference between Wei Wuxian and me. He picks up things without effort. Cultivation comes as naturally to him as breathing, whereas I have to take maximum effort and still I cannot be as good as him.” He grins at the other man. “To be honest, in a way, it is good to be shot of the endless comparisons.”

Meng Yao looks thoughtful. “Jiang gonzi is a good brother,” he says finally. “And I hope Jiang Zongzhu is too.”

“He is,” Jiang Cheng says, pauses, and continues. “And so will your brother be. Jin Zixuan and I don’t see eye to eye often due to certain personal matters, but he is a good man, Meng Yao. He’s just not very good at interacting with people or expressing himself, but he is a good person to have on your side.” He smiles at the man. “He can be a good brother, if you let him.”

Jiang Cheng really, really, hopes that he isn’t screwing things up here.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Lan Jingyi endures an awkward dinner, and worries about Jin Ling and his uncle

Fourteen

Chapter Summary

Lan Jingyi just wants the awkward dinner to end

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for all the amazing comments. For those who wonder about why Jiang Cheng hasn't reconciled with Wei Wuxian in the present, but behaves well towards the one in the past, the one in the past hasn't done anything to hurt Jiang Cheng yet, and in the present there is Lan Wangji who has been a bit of an obstacle, though his intentions are good.

Enjoy the new chapter.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Jingyi suppresses another sigh. Wei qianbei is just pushing food around in his plate, a frown on his face. Hanguang Jun is watching his husband, and not eating. Sizhui is looking at his parents and not eating, and though Jingyi is hungry and holds the view that food makes everything better, he doesn't want to be the only one to eat.

Briefly he wonders how Jin Ling is doing. If Wei qianbei looks this bad, Jin Ling has to be worse. Jingyi wants to go to him, but takes comfort from the fact that Zizhen is there. Zizhen will probably be able to get Jin Ling to eat something too.

“Wei qianbei,” Sizhui says. “You should eat something.”

“Hmm?” Wei qianbei looks at him.

“If you starve yourself and fall sick, how can you help Jiang Zongzhu?” Jingyi adds his own persuasion, and hopes that it works.

Wei qianbei nods. “You’re right,” he says softly before turning to smile at Hanguang Jun, “Ah, Lan Zhan, don’t look so worried. I’m quite all right. Just worried about Jiang Cheng,”

“Mn,” Hanguang Jun says.

The meal is silent which is normally not something Jingyi takes issue with. After all, he is a Lan, and there is a rule about not talking while eating, but Jingyi has been skirting the edge of that rule while away from Cloud Recesses. But this meal feels weird because Wei qianbei is

so silent. Even in Cloud Recesses, Wei qianbei is talkative during meals just as much as he is at any other time. At this point, even Grandmaster Lan is used to it, and having him fall silent like this feels unnatural. As if it is against the natural order of things.

Jingyi decides to break the rule because he can't abide this silence from Wei qianbei.

"Is it very bad?" he asks. "Jiang Zongzhu's condition?"

They none of them know what exactly is wrong with Jiang Zongzhu. Zizhen only has an overheard bit of conversation where Zhou daifu has admitted that there's nothing healers can do. Neither Jin Ling nor Wei qianbei has told them anything about what's ailing Jiang Zongzhu, and Jingyi has no hopes that Hanguang Jun will ever say anything.

Wei qianbei's shoulder slumps. "I don't know, Jingyi," he admits, quiet and almost broken. "I can only hope that it isn't." He lifts his head, and tries to smile at them. "How is Jin Ling doing?"

"Zizhen is with him," Sizhui says. "Ouyang Zongzhu, I mean."

"I met him," Wei qianbei says. "Do all of you meet up often for night hunts?"

"When we can," Sizhui says. "Jin Ling and Zizhen are Sect Leaders, so it isn't easy for them to make time as easily as I or Jingyi can. Still, we try."

Jingyi is aware of the faint tension with which Sizhui is holding himself, and knows the source of it. He bumps his shoulder against Sizhui's, an accidental touch as he leans to take some chicken from one of the serving dishes. He hopes that the touch reassures Sizhui. It's not like he can offer more with Hanguang Jun and Wei qianbei here. Though Sizhui is an adult, his parents are protective, and if they have any inkling... well, Jingyi doesn't want to think of what may happen.

Sizhui is afraid of giving himself away in front of his parents, especially now with their concern for Jin Ling—in view of what Zizhen said—overriding all other concerns. Jingyi is itching to be in Zizhen's room, to see that Jin Ling is all right, but he has to get through this dinner. Sometimes Jin Ling can get overwhelmed, even if it is only them, and Zizhen is better than Jingyi at providing comfort.

Besides, Hanguang Jun and Wei qianbei might have thought it odd if Sizhui is not there with them, and Jingyi needs to be here to support his friend. With the way they are feeling right now, he knows Sizhui will have a hard time keeping himself in check, and it is only Jingyi's presence that's helping him maintain that calm façade.

"But Jiang Zongzhu will be all right, won't he?" Jingyi asks, again distracting Wei qianbei from paying attention to them and Jin Ling.

"Yes," Wei qianbei smiles reassuringly. "Of course, he will be. He's a fighter. He'll be all right."

Jingyi wishes Wei qianbei will fall silent again, because he can hear the false note, the forced cheer in the words that sound like Wei qianbei is trying to reassure himself more, and that is just as bad as silence.

“I didn’t know you were frequent visitors to Lotus Pier,” Wei qianbei says, and there is a wistful note in his voice, and both Sizhui and Jingyi tense again.

“Not that frequent,” Jingyi says. “We’re all fairly busy, and though Jiang Zongzhu always looks happy to see us, he is a busy man too.”

“Jiang Zongzhu has been very kind to all of us,” Sizhui says. “Baba, is he... is he really going to be all right?”

Wei qianbei sighs. “I don’t know, A-Yuan,” he says. “But... but I am going to do everything I can, no matter how long it takes.”

Hanguang Jun doesn’t say anything, but Jingyi sees the widening of his eyes, and realises that the declaration has taken him by surprise.

“He’s my brother,” Wei qianbei says, the words soft and spilling into the silence like ripples. “And I cannot... I need to tell him... I need to fix things between us.”

“Baba,” Sizhui says quietly. “He knows I’m a Wen. He has always known, he says, and...” Sizhui draws a deep breath and releases it. He turns to look at Jingyi who nods. “The last time we were here, Jiang Zongzhu asked me to call him Shufu.”

Hanguang Jun’s hand spasms around his chopstick which is the equivalent of him falling over in shock. Wei qianbei’s eyes are wide as he stares at Sizhui.

“Oh,” he says, a wet noise, but warm and hopeful. “Why didn’t you tell me before?”

Sizhui shrugs. “I wasn’t sure how you will take it,” he says. “Both of you.” He pauses. “He... he hasn’t asked me to keep it a secret, if that’s what you thought.”

“And is this something you want?” Wei qianbei asks. “Jiang Cheng is... not the easiest person to be around.”

“Neither is Jin Ling,” Jingyi says before he can think. “I think Jiang Zongzhu is not as bad as his reputation says. He’s been kind to us, and very patient with Sizhui’s boat sickness this one time Jin Ling dragged us all to pick Lotus pods.”

He feels very defensive about Jiang Zongzhu who has been very kind to all of them ever since they started being friends with Jin Ling.

“I don’t have that much family left that I can pass over an uncle who cares for me,” Sizhui adds softly.

Wei qianbei nods, looking thoughtful. “You’re right,” he says equally softly as he straightens his back. “He’s important to all of us. Yes, Lan Zhan, even to you. Don’t tell me you hated him when the two of you were searching for me at the beginning of the Sunshot campaign.”

“Situation changed,” Hanguang Jun says, and then reluctantly. “Jiang Wanyin changed.”

“Maybe,” Wei qianbei says. “But so did I, Lan Zhan. It was not an easy time for any of us, and we all changed in one way or the other. Let us not talk about it further.”

Jingyi is glad when the two seniors leave. He and Sizhui make their way to Zizhen’s room, and without a word all of them pile on the large bed. It occurs to Jingyi that the beds in all of their rooms are larger than normal, large enough to accommodate all four of them. Somehow, he doesn’t think that it is happenstance. Jiang Zongzhu is either more observant than he has realised or Jin Ling has told him, and he doesn’t object. He doesn’t want to talk of it now, because now isn’t the right time.

But Jingyi plans to thank Jiang Zongzhu as soon as possible.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: The war ends, and there are a few surprises in store.

Fifteen

Chapter Summary

The War ends, and rebuilding starts.

Chapter Notes

Here's a new chapter as a treat since I woke up early, and I wanted to be asleep, lol.
Thank you all for supporting this work

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

The end of the war is faster this time, and if Jiang Cheng made sure that Jin Guangshan will be trapped in an area where the fighting is the fiercest, well, nobody else has noticed it. The man dies a hero, however, and no matter how it sours his mood to hear that bastard referred to in that way, it still beats the alternative. A dead Jin Guangshan is better than a living Jin Guangshan any day, and if hearing him being referred to as a hero is the price for that, Jiang Cheng will gladly pay it.

Wen Ruohan is killed by Lan Xichen, Nie Mingjue and Wei Wuxian together. The bastard's cultivation level was too high that one of them alone couldn't have taken him on, and this time they didn't have anyone to stab him from the back either. Still, the man was dead, and that makes things a lot easier for Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian.

They have a cultivation conference right there in Qishan, in the Nightless City, and Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian make a plea to spare the non-combatants and civilians from any punishments to which both Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue lend their support, and Jin Zixuan does the same. The minor sects are upset, but with the four remaining major Sects in accord, there is little they can do.

It is Wei Wuxian who brings up the next issue. Wen Qing and Wen Ning. He tells them that the siblings had saved their lives at great risk to themselves, and that they are doctors and not fighters. Wei Wuxian argues that Wen Qing should be considered the Sect Leader of the remaining Wens, and that the Sect should be allowed to continue. He argues that with their power reduced, and with Wen Qing in charge, and the territories they took from the minor sects returned to the heirs of those sects, the Wen aren't likely to be a threat anymore.

Lan Xichen readily supports the proposal, and so does Jin Zixuan who, Jiang Cheng is beginning to suspect, has ulterior motives. Jin Zixuan had already made an ass out of himself over the soup issue, and is probably trying to curry favour with both A-Jie and Wei Wuxian

by agreeing to everything Wei Wuxian proposes. Nie Mingjue frowns for a long moment before agreeing as well.

“So, when can we go home?” Jiang Cheng asks quietly when some minor Sect Leaders start talking about reparations, and Wei Wuxian leans against him.

“Tomorrow, I hope,” he says.

Lan Wangji glares at him, but Jiang Cheng ignores him, muttering. “Are you the cultivator or the civilian? Shouldn’t I be the one leaning against you?”

Wei Wuxian chuckles, and gives him a smile. “Ah, Jiang Cheng, let this poor Sect Leader rest against his brother for a moment.”

That night, everyone sleeps in their tents, no one wanting to sleep in Wen Ruohan’s palace. A-Jie brings them soup in Wei Wuxian’s tent, and smiles at them both, and they sit talking for a long time.

“I’m almost afraid to go home,” Wei Wuxian admits at one point. “I know we have to, that we have to resettle Yunmeng and rebuild Lotus Pier, but... I am so afraid.” He looks at them both and his eyes are haunted. “I don’t know if I can do this,” he says. “The war... that is easy, that’s just fighting... this... how do I do it?”

“You won’t have to do it alone,” Jiang Cheng tells him. “We’ll be both with you.”

“We’ll do it, A-xian,” A-Jie too says. “Together. The three of us will do it.”

After their sister leaves, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng lie down on the same bed, as they had been doing throughout the war, as if they were still the children they once had been.

“I thought he was going to kill us all,” Wei Wuxian admits in the dark, his voice quiet. “He was... he was so strong, Jiang Cheng... I really didn’t think we were going to make it, but Chifeng Zun... he really turned the tide of that battle. He absolutely refused to give an inch.”

Something cold settles in Jiang Cheng’s stomach. Wei Wuxian could have died. He doesn’t know what he would have done if something had happened to his brother.

He mutters, “You better make sure you cultivate to immortality, you idiot. I can’t lose you.”

“Aiya, Jiang Cheng, I don’t want to be an immortal, and leave my shidi behind.”

“Didi,” Jiang Cheng says. “Not shidi.”

“Oh,” Wei Wuxian says, something soft in his eyes, and wet. “Oh.”

Jiang Cheng gives him an amused glance. “If I’d known this is all it takes to shut you up—”

Wei Wuxian’s arms are so careful when they wrap around him, but Jiang Cheng has no such reservations. He knows that no matter how tightly he holds him, he cannot hurt his brother.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian murmurs into his chest. “Are you still thinking of letting Shijie marry that peacock?”

“That peacock is a Sect Leader now,” Jiang Cheng reminds him. “And you should at least be polite, and try not to punch him anymore.”

“He made her *cry*, Jiang Cheng.” Wei Wuxian’s hands fist in his robes. “Over *soup*. He—”

“I *know*,” Jiang Cheng has already lived through this once, has seen how Jin Zixuan changed, became someone softer, warmer, who looked at A-Jie like she hung the moon, and at Jin Ling like he couldn’t believe how he got so lucky.

Jiang Cheng wants that for his sister, and his nephew.

“Wei Wuxian,” he says softly. “If he ever wants to court her, it will be *her decision* whether to accept him or not. Not mine, not yours. Neither of us are *letting* her do anything when she’s capable of making her own decisions.”

“I just don’t want to lose her,” Wei Wuxian mumbles.

Jiang Cheng holds him tight. “We’re not *losing* her,” he says. “We’re just gaining the peacock as a brother-in-law.”

“I thought you said he should be respected?” Wei Wuxian says, a teasing lilt to his tone. “Now that he’s a Sect Leader and all?”

Jiang Cheng deadpans. “That’s only for the other Sect Leaders, not their brothers, so Nie Huisang, Lan Wangji, Meng Yao and I can get together to talk shit about all of you.”

Wei Wuxian laughs. In the quiet night, it is loud, and Jiang Cheng is grateful for the privacy talismans.

In the morning, both of them are grumpy with lack of sleep, but nervous excitement keeps them awake. They bid goodbye to the other Sect Leaders, and Jiang Cheng sees the furtive glances Jin Zixuan throws at A-Jie when he thinks no one is looking. He probably thinks he is being subtle. Lan Wangji on the other hand, is anything but. He stares at Wei Wuxian and doesn’t seem to acknowledge anyone else, the longing in his eyes clear for anyone to see. Anyone who knows how to decipher his minute expressions, and Wei Wuxian hasn’t got there yet.

But Jiang Cheng knows his brother better than he knows Lan Wangji whom he had begun to observe and read only lately. Wei Wuxian is attempting to be casual with his, “See you later, Lan Zhan,” but there is very real yearning behind the careless façade.

Jiang Cheng sighs, and hopes that they will be able to afford a bride price worthy of the mighty Hanguang Jun sometime within the next decade. He is not having his brother wait another thirteen years to marry the love of his life. He is pretty sure it will make Wei Wuxian miserable to wait that long, and a miserable Wei Wuxian is an annoying Wei Wuxian.

His brother never did have any patience, after all.

Their first sight of Lotus Pier is a punch to the gut. It doesn't matter that he has been here before, that they know what they are going to find. In Jiang Cheng's mind, he can see Lotus Pier as he saw it last, in his past. This place will be that someday, or something similar, but it is not yet.

"Where do we even start?" Wei Wuxian whispers.

"Where do you want to start?" Jiang Cheng asks even as Wei Wuxian reaches out to him blindly.

"There's so much to do," Wei Wuxian mutters.

"Should keep you out of trouble for a while," Jiang Cheng smirks, and gets punched in the shoulder for his trouble.

They start the next day, and the first task is to cleanse the lake. Jiang Cheng is almost useless there, but he helps fish out the rotting bodies that have not been washed away, and helps with the building of a temporary shelter to house the elderly and the very young. Wei Wuxian turns out to be good at delegating, and he leaves physical labour to civilians while cultivators use their spiritual energy to cleanse and to do tasks beyond the ability of a non-cultivator.

As he hammers another plank into place, Jiang Cheng finds muscle memory returning. Wei Wuxian kneels next to him, looks at him carefully.

"Teach me," he says, and Jiang Cheng does. Wei Wuxian is a fast learner, and his old body is strong, even without using spiritual energy. Between them, they finish one deck within the week.

A-Jie is in charge of the medical tents and the kitchens. Wei Wuxian attends to Sect matters—meetings with minor Sect Leaders who deign to visit, and civilians who are repopulating Lotus Pier, answering correspondence—in the morning, and works alongside Jiang Cheng and the others in the afternoon. The number of their disciples have swelled to five hundred, and four hundred of them are patrolling the borders of YunmengJiang especially where they adjoin that of some of the minor Sects.

Wei Wuxian had been initially sceptical when Jiang Cheng had asked him to do it, but after five attempts by various minor sects to encroach into YunmengJiang territory, he has acknowledged that it is necessary. It has also caused some of those minor Sect Leaders to visit him in a huff, demanding to know why there are armed patrols in the borders where there had been none in the time of the previous Sect Leader.

Wei Wuxian looks them in the eyes and calls them out on their bullshit every time. Being a Sect Leader hasn't made him any more diplomatic in this life than in his past, but he has learned some restraint, and Jiang Cheng thinks that the absence of resentful energy definitely helps. Wei Wuxian knows just how much to push, and where to draw the line. He doesn't let the minor Sect Leaders get away with their bullshit, and he is as direct as Jiang Cheng had been once, but he has learned to do it with such unfailing courtesy that most of the minor Sect Leaders have no idea if they are being insulted or not.

The three of them laugh about it in the evenings, and Wei Wuxian is softer in those times, his posture loose, shoulders relaxed, and his smile lighting his eyes. There aren't enough Lotus roots yet to make soup for everyone, but A-Jie tries all the same.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng accompanies A-Jie to the market, and haggles with the merchants. The merchants are also affected by the war and the sacking by the Wens, but most of them still try and give them reasonable rates, confident in their Sect Leader, and aware that they rise and fall with YunmengJiang. Some are outsiders, though, looking to make a profit out of people's sufferings, and tries to hoard grain and other such, even trying to bully other merchants to sell to them rather than to the starving populace.

That is the first time Jiang Cheng sees A-Jie use Zidian, and the profit mongers run howling through the streets, Zidian's marks clear on their backs, and legs.

"And never return to Lotus Pier!" Wei Wuxian shouts at them, in between gusts of laughter, and even Jiang Cheng is doubled over.

A-Jie gives them both affectionate looks while Wei Wuxian decides what to do with the merchandise the scoundrels left behind. Most of it is food, and it helps with tiding over the worst of the shortage the men were trying to engineer.

Disgusting fuckers, Jiang Cheng thinks.

Chapter End Notes

Jin Ling is getting frustrated with not getting his uncle back, and thinks of other things

Sixteen

Chapter Summary

Jin Ling is upset, reflects on his relationships and gets some good news

Chapter Notes

We're going to get to the good parts soon, and it will all end well, I promise!!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

After a week, they are no closer to finding a solution. Jin Ling is ready to tear his hair out, and if not for his friends' presence, he might have. Wei Wuxian is trying his best, and even Hanguang Jun is beginning to be a little bit concerned, according to Sizhui who apparently can read the man's emotions just as well as Wei Wuxian can. Jin Ling is already getting messages from his second in command and the Sect elders about when he will be back, and so is Zizhen. Neither of them can neglect their own Sects for too long, despite the fact that both their positions are secure and they are still at peace.

Jin Ling thinks that he would rather secede than leave Jiujiu.

Zewu Jun arrives unexpectedly one day, refuses to give any explanations, murmurs apologies for intruding, but refuses to leave. Jin Ling doesn't want to do it, but he has to quarter the man in the same residential wing as Hanguang Jun and Wei Wuxian. It was either that or quarter him with his friends, and despite how much they may admire the First Jade of Lan, they're not ready for him to find out anything.

It cannot be a secret forever, Jin Ling knows. His friends know the same, but they are all equally reluctant to let anyone know just yet. Jin Ling is fairly certain that Jiujiu knows, but then Jiujiu knows him better than anyone, so it makes sense. Also, the larger than normal beds in all of their rooms indicate Jiujiu's tacit approval, so Jin Ling isn't too bothered that Jiujiu knows.

He isn't ready for anyone else to know right now.

Despite the much publicised and—by now—widely accepted marriage between Hanguang Jun and the Yiling Patriarch, cut sleeve relationships are still widely frowned upon by the cultivation world. Jin Ling remembers how he himself had been once, insulting who he thought was Mo Xuanyu.

Sooner or later, the world will know, but Jin Ling wants it to be on their own terms. Their relationship is more tangled than a simple cut sleeve relationship. There are four of them involved for one. Two of them are Sect Leaders for another. That Jin Ling is the nephew of Jiang Zongzhu and Zizhen the Sect Leader of BalingOuyang which has always been traditionally affiliated to YunmengJiang is another problem. That Sizhui is the Lan Sect Heir and technically, by adoption and marriage, Jin Ling's cousin is also an issue. Sizhui is also Jingyi's cousin by adoption which is yet another challenge.

The whole situation is a political minefield even if there was no cut sleevy involved. That is just another dimension to the whole messy situation.

A more practical man than Jin Ling would have decided to end it, and to conform to the norm. But Jin Ling is not just a Jin. He is also a Jiang, and if he doesn't attempt the impossible for this, then what is the point in anything?

So, Zewu Jun is put in a room as far away from Hanguang Jun and Wei Wuxian as it is possible to be in the same building, and Jin Ling continues to stay with his friends in their wing. The staff at Lotus Pier are used to the state of affairs, and make no comments. If any of them have suspected anything, they don't show it. Besides, Jin Ling and his friends haven't done anything more than cuddling this time around, the worry for Jiujiu leading Jin Ling to seek comfort in hugs and cuddles rather than in sex.

Jin Ling sits by his uncle watching Wei Wuxian make notations on a piece of paper, muttering to himself. He can't catch what he's saying, since it's spoken too softly. Jin Ling suspects that the man is thinking aloud and doesn't even realise it.

Jin Ling has nothing to do and has asked Zhang Xiu to bring him Sandu. He wants to clean Jiujiu's sword since he is sure no one has bothered to do it till now.

Jin Ling draws Sandu, and Wei Wuxian's sharp glance falls on him, an arrested expression on his face.

"What?" Jin Ling asks.

Everyone in the room perks up. Hanguang Jun and Zewu Jun has been keeping out of Wei Wuxian's way by sitting in a corner and conversing in low tones. Zizhen has been attending to some correspondence sitting near Jin Ling, and Sizhui and Jingyi has been helping while sorting some of Jin Ling's own correspondence.

Right now, all of them are looking at Wei Wuxian.

"Suibian," Wei Wuxian says, waving his hands wildly.

Jin Ling rolls his eyes. "This is *Sandu*," he says, not bothering to hide his annoyance. "What are you on about?"

"No!" Wei Wuxian shakes his head. "Suibian. We could both draw it."

"We all know that," Jin Ling says impatiently. "What is your point?"

Wei Wuxian lifts both his hands in a gesture that says stop. “Suibian sealed itself after my death,” he says, not seeming to notice the full body flinch from his husband at the words. “That’s how Jin Guangyao knew it was me in Mo Xuanyu’s body at Koi Tower that day, because I was able to draw Suibian.”

“Because it is your spiritual sword,” Zizhen says, sounding as baffled as Jin Ling felt. “And it is your soul in Mo Xuanyu’s body, and the sword obviously recognised that.”

“Correct,” Wei Wuxian says. “But later, Jiang Cheng was also able to draw the sword, though it was still sealed to everyone else.”

“Because you gave him his golden core!” Jin Ling snaps. It is not something he is too comfortable talking about. He doesn’t think anyone in this room is. “So, the sword thought he was you.”

“Exactly,” Wei Wuxian beams. “Now, this body of Mo Xuanyu has a golden core of its own, even if weak. Still, Suibian recognised me. But it also recognised Jiang Cheng as me.”

“So, you’re saying that a spiritual weapon recognises both the golden core as well as the soul of its owner,” Zewu Jun says, “But I don’t see how that solves our present problem.”

“What is our present problem?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“Jiang Zongzhu is not waking up,” Jingyi says with a scowl.

“We have tried various methods of waking him already,” Wei Wuxian says. “We’ve even tried inquiry and a modified empathy, but it is as if his mind or soul is not present.”

“Yes?” Jin Ling says cautiously.

“As we know, a cultivator’s mind or soul and his golden core are linked,” Wei Wuxian says. “But since Jiang Cheng’s core was once mine, my soul is also linked to it. That means I can use that connection to find him.”

“Wei qianbei,” Sizhui says. “Even if your soul is linked to Shufu’s golden core—”

“Wei Ying’s golden core,” Hanguang Jun interrupts, and Zewu Jun’s expression morphs into surprise at hearing Sizhui refer to Jiujiu as Shufu.

Sizhui falls silent, but before Jin Ling can yell at the Second Jade of Lan, Wei Wuxian intervenes.

“No, Lan Zhan,” he says firmly. “From the moment I gave it away, it has been his. At this point, he’s had it longer than I ever did. Besides, I gave it to him, Lan Zhan; he didn’t take it from me.”

“He wouldn’t have if you had asked!” Jin Ling can’t help but snap.

A pained expression crosses Wei Wuxian’s face. “I know,” he admits, his voice low, which really doesn’t gratify Jin Ling because Hanguang Jun is the asshole who needs to understand

it, not Wei Wuxian.

“Wei qianbei,” Zizhen says, voice a mite high. “How do you propose to use the connection to find Jiang Zongzhu?”

“We will need an array,” Wei Wuxian says. “And probably a stupid amount of spiritual energy to power it. It’s good that we have all these strong and powerful cultivators here.”

Jin Ling scoffs, but he also can’t help feeling a bit hopeful now.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Jin Zixuan manages not to bungle his proposal this time, thanks to Jiang Yanli's brothers

Seventeen

Chapter Summary

Jin Zixuan comes to Lotus Pier on a visit, awkward dinners and a confession ensues in which Jiang Yanli's brothers prove that they're the best

Chapter Notes

I wrote another very short time travel fix-it in one day, and then I read all the comments here, and I am so grateful to all of you because you're all the best!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

There is an invitation for a night hunt in Phoenix Mountain as part of the celebrations for the end of the War. Jiang Cheng doesn't want to go to either the celebration or the hunt. Well, he can't night hunt anyway, but neither Wei Wuxian or A-Jie is accepting his refusal, insisting that he has to attend the celebration. Jin Zixuan has delivered an invitation from his mother to A-Jie, and she has accepted, but it started raining soon after, so they are forced to put Jin Zixuan up for the night.

“Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng glowers at his brother as they settle down for dinner, continuing their argument from earlier. Having a guest means they can't just sit in one of their rooms and talk while having soup. “Why do you want me to go? I can't hunt, and there's so much to be done here still. The north pier—”

“Will be perfectly fine even if you take a few days off,” Wei Wuxian says. “Come on, Jiang Cheng. Give me some company at least. Would you leave your Sect Leader to the mercies of the rest of the cultivation world?”

Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes. “They're your peers, you idiot.”

Having a guest should have perhaps made him moderate his behaviour, but Jin Zixuan can suck it up. He is the intruder here, after all.

“My brother would like it if you come, Jiang gonzi,” Jin Zixuan says. “He talks very highly of you.”

Jiang Cheng chokes on his soup. Getting on Meng Yao's—Jin Ziyao now—good graces has never been a goal with him, not even when he attempted so clumsily to help the man.

“See?” Wei Wuxian says triumphantly. “And Huaisang has been asking when we will visit the Unclean Realm for a while now. We’ll get a chance to see him as well. Come on, it’s just a few days. We all could do with a break. You’ve been working harder than even me, and I am the Sect Leader.”

That is a lie, and they both know it. Wei Wuxian has been pushing himself to the limit, but Jiang Cheng is not about to point it out in front of the peacock.

“A-Cheng,” A-Jie says gently. “You should come.”

And that is that. Neither of them can ever deny her anything, and if she wants him to go to Lanling, he will definitely go. He can see the soft smile on her face, the hope she dares not show yet, the way she avoids looking directly at Jin Zixuan whose eyes have never left her face. Wei Wuxian’s eyes meet Jiang Cheng, and he sees the same exasperated amusement in his eyes that he himself feels right then.

Jiang Cheng steels himself, and turns to the peacock. “Jin Zongzhu,” he says. “How is your mother?”

In their previous life, Madam Jin hadn’t outlived her husband by much; broken and shamed, not by his death, but by the manner of it, she had become a recluse, wasting away. In this life, she is the widow of a war hero, and her husband can no longer shame her with his many infidelities.

Jin Zixuan drags his eyes from A-Jie’s face with great reluctance. He attempts a smile at Jiang Cheng who has the oddest impulse to reach out and touch the man. He looks so much like Jin Ling, with his cheeks dusted with colour, and his face doing that thing that Jin Ling often does when he’s embarrassed, and trying to hide it.

“She’s fine,” Jin Zixuan says. “We’re all still in mourning for my father, but... we’re fine. Thank you for asking.”

“And how is your brother settling in?” he asks.

Jin Zixuan’s eyes light up, and there is a fond smile on his face. “He’s settling in well,” he says. “He’s happy, and he assists me with everything.” His face is red now. “Much like you and Jiang Zongzhu. I don’t know what I’ll do without A-Yao. It’s been... I’m glad he came to us, and I’m glad of the help you all gave him before he did.”

“I am glad,” Jiang Cheng says sincerely. He thinks of the body Wei Wuxian has been resurrected in in that other life. Mo Xuanyu has been an illegitimate son of Jin Guangshan as well.

Except Jiang Cheng is beginning to have some suspicions about the life he has now.

“Jiang Zongzhu,” Jin Zixuan says, and Wei Wuxian looks at him.

“Yes, Jin Zongzhu,” he says, scrupulously polite, but Jiang Cheng knows him, knows Wei Wuxian would rather be anywhere but in the vicinity of Jin Zixuan and forced to be polite to

him.

“I wanted to ask you a favour,” Jin Zixuan says, his face a very dark red now. “My father... there are rumours that he has other children, and I... I was wondering if you can create a talisman or something to help us find them. A-Yao and I... we would like to bring them all home, if we’re allowed.”

Wei Wuxian regards Jin Zixuan thoughtfully. “Very well,” he says. “I’ll see if I can create one.”

Jin Zixuan bows. “Jiang Zongzhu is most gracious,” he murmurs.

There is a soft look on A-Jie’s face as she glances at Jin Zixuan, and Jiang Cheng feels a headache building. The rest of the dinner passes in near silence, before Jiang Cheng remembers something from the past, and decides that he will stop Wei Wuxian from making that talisman at any cost. He can maybe find a way to point Jin Zixuan in Mo Xuanyu’s direction, but he thinks it will be too cruel to the Qin family to have their shame brought to light, especially since Qin Zongzhu and Qin Su had been unaware.

Speaking of-

“I heard some rumours about the daughter of Qin Zongzhu,” he says. “That your brother saved her life, and that Qin Zongzhu has now approached you regarding a courtship.”

A frown appears on Jin Zixuan’s face. “A-Yao has told me that he isn’t interested in Qin guniang,” he says. “I have conveyed to Qin Zongzhu his wishes in the matter, but he is still persisting.”

“Reassure him that the alliance between LanlingJin and LaolinQin will continue as hitherto even though your father is dead,” Wei Wuxian says. “He may be afraid that you may not honour the alliance, and thinks that a marriage is needed to shore it up.”

Jin Zixuan frowns. “Qin Zongzhu is one of my father’s oldest friends, and the alliance between our two sects is longstanding,” he says. “Why should Qin Zongzhu question it now?”

“Sometimes you need to tell people what’s in your mind rather than thinking they should know it,” Jiang Cheng says. “He may be your father’s oldest friend and the alliance longstanding, but your father is dead now, and you’re the Sect Leader. Unless you use your words and tell him that you consider your alliance standing, he will doubt if it does.”

Jin Zixuan nods, looking thoughtful. “I see. I may have to use my words, I suppose.” He bows to them both. “Thank you.”

Wei Wuxian is looking at him with a strange expression. “It will get easier,” he says quietly, and Jiang Cheng nearly drops his chopsticks at his tone. It is far gentler and sincere than he has ever used with Jin Zixuan in either of their lives. “It’s always hard in the beginning, stepping into a role you’re not sure you are good enough for, being expected to fill shoes that feel larger than you can, but it gets easier.”

There is astonishment in Jin Zixuan's face as well as he looks at Wei Wuxian, and Jiang Cheng is reminded that Jin Zixuan is also so very young, and he looks so much like Jin Ling that Jiang Cheng has to look away, and swallow past the lump in his throat, and blink back his tears.

He doesn't think anything will ever get rid of this persistent ache inside him that comes from missing his nephew, the child he raised from an infant, the man who is far better a Sect leader and a person that he has ever been or will ever be. Jiang Cheng is full of pride for his nephew, but he misses him like a part of himself that's gone. Even the happiness of this life isn't enough to fill the emptiness Jin Ling's absence has left.

Jin Zixuan bows again to Wei Wuxian, stammering a bit now. "Jiang Zongzhu is very kind... thank you."

"Doesn't mean I won't punch you if you hurt my sister again," Wei Wuxian says casually.

A-Jie blushes, and Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, glad to the return to normalcy.

Jin Zixuan swallows, his face a deep crimson now. "It is my ardent wish that I should never cause Jiang guniang any pain ever," he says quietly.

Jiang Cheng stills, and his eyes meet Wei Wuxian's. A-Jie is looking at Jin Zixuan with surprise, but also hope and love shining out of her eyes, and Jin Zixuan is as red as a beet, and looking down at his soup bowl though it is already empty.

Can you believe this? Jiang Cheng lifts his eyebrows.

Better than the last soup he had, Wei Wuxian shrugs. *At least he isn't making her cry.*

True enough, Jiang Cheng grimaces.

A-Jie looks happy, Wei Wuxian's face softens.

He looks smitten, Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes. *Why can't he just say it?*

Wei Wuxian says, "Jin Zongzhu," he says. "What do you mean by that? Is that an apology for all the times before?"

Jin Zixuan tears his eyes from the empty soup bowl, face still red, and looks at Wei Wuxian. "Jiang Zongzhu, Jiang gonzi, Jiang guniang... I would certainly like to apologise for my behaviour in the past... and I would like to reinstate my engagement with Jiang guniang if it pleases her and her brothers."

A-Jie's smile is blinding, and Wei Wuxian pinches the bridge of his nose. "Shijie," he says. "Are you sure about this?"

She nods. "Yes, A-Xian," she says softly, but she is blushing as well, and refuses to look at Jin Zixuan.

"Jiang Cheng?" Wei Wuxian asks.

“I just want A-Jie to be happy,” Jiang Cheng says, and for some reason, it makes Jin Zixuan blush even more.

“So do I,” Wei Wuxian says, and he nods at Jin Zixuan. “We’ll be amenable to reinstating the engagement, Jin Zongzhu, but we’re all still in mourning, including you.” He indicates the white sashes that they all are wearing. “And we’re still rebuilding, and we have no elders. The negotiations will have to wait till the town is fully resettled, and the family residences are complete. The marriage will have to wait till we’re all out of mourning.”

During the war, they hadn’t had time to mourn, or even to wear a white sash. In his last life, the end of the war had brought even more problems. Jiang Cheng realises with a shock that this is the first time that he is wearing white for his parents, that he is being allowed to mourn them freely, to accept their loss as the greatest in his life, and not as the beginning of a series of losses that had left him all alone.

“Our mothers,” Jin Zixuan stammers, still blushing. “They had negotiated a bride price when they first decided the engagement. I will have A-Yao bring the documents to you when you’re in Lanling for the celebration and the hunt.”

“Jiang Cheng will be your chaperone till you reach Lanling,” Wei Wuxian says.

“What?” Jiang Cheng glares at him.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says, but he sounds serious, and Jiang Cheng hears the unspoken plea. Wei Wuxian is the Sect Leader and can’t be following Jin Zixuan and A-Jie around, their disciples are still learning, and they need most of them at Lotus Pier anyway.

There’s no one else to chaperone A-Jie and Jin Zixuan during their journey to Lanling.

“All right,” Jiang Cheng says briskly. “We will go to Lanling by carriage in the morning, and Madam Jin may appoint a suitable chaperone once we’re there.”

Jin Zixuan dips his shoulders in a bow.

Chapter End Notes

Next: Wei Wuxian tries something, and realises that achieving the impossible needs a lot more effort than he thought

Eighteen

Chapter Summary

Wei Wuxian tries something, and fails

Chapter Notes

I am getting a bit restless, and why can't books and stories just write themselves? Ah well

Bonus chapter because my mind can't focus

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wei Wuxian knows that at some point he would need to have a talk with his husband about Jiang Cheng. Because it is very evident to him that Lan Zhan is operating under a misunderstanding regarding the entirety of his relationship with Jiang Cheng. Wei Wuxian thinks that he should have done this years ago, but till Guanyin temple, Wei Wuxian hadn't really had time to pause and think of his previous life and of the choices he had made then.

He will never regret giving Jiang Cheng his golden core and he will never regret attempting to save the Wens, but he thinks that perhaps he should have waited to do the first, and sought his brother's help with the second. Looking back, he can see how the resentful energy had affected him, made him feel like he had no choice but to do what he did the way he did.

It had never occurred to him that he could have saved the Wens and kept his brother too. At the time, to him, it had seemed like an either-or situation which in the end had cost them both everything.

And what was most unfortunate was that it was others who had paid the price. Especially Jiang Cheng who had been literally left alone with a Sect to rebuild and a nephew to raise. Wei Wuxian wonders how it is that no one ever recalls that Jin Ling has been raised by Jiang Cheng when they talk of his good qualities, and only remember it when they talk of the bad. It is a miracle to Wei Wuxian that Jin Ling has forgiven him, that he doesn't hold grudges, and Wei Wuxian isn't such a fool to think that it is only his mother's nature coming forth, that his upbringing had nothing to do with it.

Jin Ling, even as a child, has been ready to forgive, to look past past grudges, to make himself vulnerable. He has been a child eager to prove himself, and though Wei Wuxian had initially blamed it on Jiang Cheng, it had taken him only one visit to Koi Tower to correct

that misconception. For all the thirst to prove himself, Jin Ling has been a confident child, and is an equally confident adult now, settled in his skin and his role, and his relationships in a way Wei Wuxian finds difficult even now.

How it is that no one credits any of that to Jiang Cheng's upbringing is a mystery to him.

Right now, however, the priority is getting Jiang Cheng back. He can talk to Lan Zhan afterwards, and he hopes he can find the words to make Lan Zhan understand. Because Wei Wuxian really wants his brother and his husband to get along, and he is certain that Jiang Cheng's animosity towards Lan Zhan is simply a reaction to Lan Zhan's own hostile feelings towards him.

It is not that Wei Wuxian doesn't understand his husband's reactions or his anger, but Lan Zhan is not the one who grew up with Jiang Cheng, who knows every single thing there is to know about the fearsome Sandu Shengshou, and if there is one thing Wei Wuxian knows about his brother, it is that Jiang Cheng loves him. Wei Wuxian had doubted it when he first came back, but he had had time to think later, to remember, and he is ashamed of himself, and of his judgement.

Let us keep it in the past, he had said.

That was in another life, he had said.

But that is not what he wants at all. He *wants* to have grown up with Jiang Cheng, to have shot kites and sparred together, and swam and plucked lotus seeds and ate watermelons. He wants to have played pranks, to have lain next to each other giggling at something funny that only the two of them shared, and he even wanted—

He even wanted to kneel at the ancestral hall in punishment, because—

Because Jiang Cheng had *never* let him kneel alone. He used to sneak in, and kneel next to him, even knowing that he will be yelled at by Madam Yu if he got caught.

Jiang Cheng had tried to get in the way of Zidian for him when Madam Yu whipped him to appease Wang Lingjiao.

Even after he came back in Mo Xuanyu's body, when he got him alone, all Jiang Cheng had wanted was to talk, all he had asked was why he didn't come back to Lotus Pier.

Even though he knew who Wei Wuxian was, he hadn't exposed him to anyone. Not even Jin Ling knew who he was.

Wei Wuxian had told him to leave it in the past because he genuinely thought Jiang Cheng hated him, but once he sifted through his memories, he knows that there is nothing he could have done that could make his brother hate him. After all Wei Wuxian had caused the death of his parents, his sister, his brother-in-law and the destruction of his Sect, and yet, Jiang Cheng hadn't hated him.

Lan Zhan doesn't know Jiang Cheng, not like Wei Wuxian does, doesn't understand that his words are only a façade, that you have to look at his actions.

Even in the Guanyin temple, Jiang Cheng got injured only because he used Zidian to block the guqin string Jin Guangyao had sent towards Wei Wuxian, giving the man an opening to stab Jiang Cheng.

Even after Wei Wuxian's death, there had been no dogs in Lotus Pier till Jin Guangyao had gifted Jin Ling with a puppy that Jiang Cheng was forced to accept.

There are no dogs in Lotus Pier to this day.

Wei Wuxian has to find his brother and bring him back so he can apologise and beg him for a chance to be his brother again. He will find the words to explain to Lan Zhan too.

He stares at the diagram he has drawn and the symbols. This is the third array that he had drawn on the page, and this one will not work either. He will have to start over. Wei Wuxian is determined to get it right, no matter how many tries it takes. He cannot afford to mess it up.

It takes him ten days in the end, but an array is ready. He is reasonably sure that it will work, and Jin Ling and Ouyang Zizhen have come back from their respective Sects because Jingyi and Sizhui had sent them messages about the completed array. Wei Wuxian draws it in one of the empty halls, and wards the room. Both Zhang Xiu and Zhou Lai are there as well as Lan Zhan, Zewu Jun and the youngsters. Jiang Cheng is laid inside the array, and Wei Wuxian directs everyone to their own positions.

He lies down parallel to Jiang Cheng.

"When I say, start feeding spiritual energy into the array till it activates, and then step back," he instructs them.

Wei Wuxian closes his eyes, and centres himself, regulates his qi, and focusses on his connection with Jiang Cheng's golden core.

"Now," he says without opening his eyes. "Start feeding spiritual energy."

He feels it when the array activates because he is suddenly pulled into something, a void of lighting and fire, and he holds on with everything he has because the void also wants to eject him from itself. He sees Jiang Cheng before him, but he vanishes before Wei Wuxian can call his name. There is a sound like a clap of thunder, and a line of purple fire snakes around his body.

Wei Wuxian shouts in pain, and the fire transforms to lightning. Jiang Cheng appears again, but doesn't see him, and once again disappears before Wei Wuxian can call out to him. Wei Wuxian holds on grimly, but he feels the void winning the battle.

It all disappears and he is lying on hard, cold ground, and around him the array is fading, the spiritual powers used up.

"It didn't work," he said, sitting up. "It needs more power. I need to redesign it."

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Some conversations happen

Nineteen

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng has some conversations, and everything is fine

Chapter Notes

Things are going to be happening soon, but not just yet

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Madam Jin is wreathed in smiles not befitting the image of the bereaved widow that she has been trying to cultivate, but Jiang Cheng lets it pass. She greets him as effusively as she does his sister, assures him that she shall provide a suitable chaperone for the couple, and sends him off with injunctions to have fun.

Jiang Cheng goes to find Jin Ziyao.

Koi Tower is the same as in his memories, most of its halls as familiar to Jiang Cheng as Lotus Pier, thanks to Jin Ling growing up here for half of every year. Jin Ziyao is giving instructions to someone about providing refreshments to the people who will be spectating the archery competition. There is a sense of déjà vu for just a moment before it passes. Jin Ziyao has never been a tall man, but as Jin Guangyao, the hat had added some height.

Without the hat, he looks absurdly small.

And his hair is still in Nie braids.

“Jin gonzi,” Jiang Cheng says, and the man turns to him.

“Jiang gonzi,” he bows and smiles, but it is not the smile that Jiang Cheng remembers, the one he had been used to seeing for so long, but a different one, warmer, more genuine.

Jiang Cheng has to orient himself for a moment. How the fuck did he even end up making friends with this man? At this rate, he’s not going to recognise himself when he goes back.

He pushes back the thought for now.

“What’s with the hair?” he asks, to cover his confusion, and Jin Ziyao blushes, making Jiang Cheng backtrack. “You don’t have to tell me. I was just curious.”

“I heard the news,” Jin Ziyao says as he leads Jiang Cheng towards a room that Jiang Cheng is certain he had not occupied in his last life. It is a set of rooms comprising a sitting room, a private study, a bedroom with a balcony, looking out over the mountains that still loom majestically despite the distance. “I’ve not seen A-Xuan this happy ever.”

A-Xuan.

Jiang Cheng lowers his gaze so Jin Ziyao won’t see his expression. In his last life, he hadn’t heard *anyone* call Jin Zixuan that other than A-Jie.

“A-Jie is happy too,” he says as he folds himself on to a cushion on one side of a desk already set with tea. Jin Ziyao kneels on the other side, his heightened colour having receded somewhat. He is still smiling that true smile.

“You seem well,” Jiang Cheng says. “You seem happy.”

Jin Ziyao’s face softens further. “I am,” he says as if he is surprised at the fact. “When... when my father died, I... I thought I would be cast out, but... here I am, and A-Xuan has been very supportive, and trying so hard to make me feel at home.” Jin Ziyao gives him a mischievous grin. “I told Huaisang this, and I’m telling you too: I’m seeing the appeal in having an older brother.”

“I’m sure Jin Zongzhu is appreciating having a younger brother as well,” Jiang Cheng says. “I heard that Zewu Jun and Chifeng Zun wanted you to swear sworn brotherhood with you and you refused?”

“They’re both very kind to me,” Jin Ziyao says, his smile crumbling. “I appreciate that they wanted to include me, but I... that’s not something I want.”

It would be a good political alliance for the Jin, and Jiang Cheng remembers how isolated he had felt the last time with the other three great sects allied and despite his connection to the Jin through A-Jie’s marriage, Jin Guangshan’s intentions had been very clear.

That was one reason Jiang Cheng had to suffer in silence when Wei Wuxian was vilified and attacked because the Jin already wanted to assimilate YunmengJiang, and he didn’t want to hand them the weapons to do it.

“I understand that someone is refusing to let go of their suit?” he says that lightly, because Jin Ziyao doesn’t know yet that Qin Su is his half-sister, but if it looks like he is considering the suit, he will have to find a way to let him as well as Qin Su know, and Jin Zixuan too.

Jin Ziyao’s smile dims, but doesn’t disappear entirely. “Qin guniang and Qin Zongzhu are very persistent,” he says. “She doesn’t believe me when I say I don’t want to marry her.”

“I hope that her father will withdraw the suit,” Jiang Cheng says. “Political marriages don’t always work out.”

“A-Xuan says he has no intention of letting me marry for anything other than love,” His hands go to touch the braid in a gesture that Jiang Cheng realises is unconscious. “But...

marriage doesn't seem to be in the cards for me."

"I'm sorry," Jiang Cheng says. He has an idea now why Jin Ziyao is wearing the braids, but he has meddled enough.

It's not like he has any experience in matters of the heart anyway, so he can't help even if he wanted to.

Jin Ziyao gives him another smile, but this one is almost sad. "It doesn't matter," he says. "One mustn't aspire too high."

"I'm sure that has nothing to do with it," Jiang Cheng says, and regrets almost immediately. He should stay out of this.

"Maybe not," Jin Ziyao says. "But... I have been given no reason, and so must presume the worst."

"Wei Wuxian and I had to *drag* a confession out of your brother at our dinner table," Jiang Cheng says. "And you know how he feels about her. Sometimes, it's not what you think. Sometimes people don't say something because they don't know how to say it."

It is something Jiang Cheng has had a great deal of experience in. He is attempting to change that this time around.

"I do not wish to confront anyone over this," Jin Ziyao mutters.

"Just ask them," Jiang Cheng says. "If they say no, you'll know. What if they say yes, though?"

Jin Ziyao looks down and mumbles, "I am not *that* brave."

Jiang Cheng decides not to speak of it further. He is not here to be a matchmaker, after all. He has no idea what exactly he is here for, but he's sure it's not to bring Nie Mingjue and Jin Ziyao together. Or anyone else.

But he'll have to do *something* about Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji.

"How's the preparations for the hunt going?" he asks, distracting them both from their less than happy thoughts.

"They're going well," Jin Ziyao says. "A-Xuan is taking care of that, since he says I have enough work on my own." His tone makes it clear that he thinks his brother is wrong.

Jiang Cheng chuckles. "I'm sure he wants to help," he says. "Your brother isn't incompetent, you know."

"I know," Jin Ziyao says. "I'm not denying that it's nice to be appreciated and cared for, but I like working." A frown appears on his face. "Oh," he says. "The tea has grown cold and we haven't even poured it."

He heats it up with some spiritual energy, and pours them both a cup of tea each.

“A-Xuan has also been helping me with my cultivation,” he admits in a low voice. “He says I’ve nothing to be ashamed of, that he is proud of me.”

He sounds surprised.

“Has no one ever said that to you?” Jiang Cheng asks.

“Not like that, no... Nie Zongzhu has praised my work while I was in the Unclean Realm, and Zewu Jun as well.”

“Neither of them would lie,” Jiang Cheng says as he sips his tea. That is something he can be sure of in any timeline. Neither Nie Mingjue nor Lan Xichen is *capable* of deception.

“Will you be taking part in the hunt?” Jin Ziyao asks. “I’m sure you can manage to capture more prey than most even as you are.”

Jiang Cheng laughs, but it doesn’t feel bitter. “Thank you for the ego boost, but no, I’m not taking part. I can’t risk the kind of injuries we may sustain on a hunt like this.”

“Ah, of course,” Jin Ziyao nods. “I forgot about that. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Jiang Cheng says. “I’m not. Though getting injured might be better than watching your brother moon over my sister all day long.”

Jin Ziyao laughs at that.

Jiang Cheng thanks him for the tea and leaves soon, a servant directing him to his sister. She is in the gardens, and Jin Zixuan is nowhere nearby.

“I thought he will not leave you alone with how he was looking at you all through our journey,” he says as greeting.

She gives him a warm, gentle smile. “He’s busy with preparations for the night hunt, and I wanted to be away from Madam Jin for a moment.”

“Annoying?” he asks.

“You remember how mother was about A-Xian?” she asks. “It’s almost the same, except it’s against Jin Ziyao who is actually her husband’s child.” She shakes her head. “She cannot speak a full sentence without finding a way to insert a remark about him and his parentage. She also complains because her son has told her not to refer to his brother so insultingly.”

Jiang Cheng remembers what prompted him to want to help Jin Ziyao in the first place. “I was reminded of Wei Wuxian when I first met him,” Jiang Cheng says. “I’m glad he’s found acceptance here.”

“So has A-Xian in Lotus Pier,” she says, but looks sad, and Jiang Cheng knows what she’s thinking. Wei Wuxian may have found his place and acceptance, but the cost of it has been

too high. Even though none of it is his fault, Jiang Cheng thinks that his mother would have been angry at how things turned out.

She probably would have expected Wei Wuxian to force Jiang Cheng to accept his golden core.

“So, everyone will be arriving tomorrow,” Jiang Cheng says, wanting a reprieve from his thoughts. “Maybe you can catch up with Wen Qing. You seem to get along well with her.”

“She won’t be coming,” A-Jie says. “She has some patients she can’t leave, but her brother will be here to attend the archery competition. He won’t be participating in the hunt either.”

“Do people still hate them?” Jiang Cheng asks, frowning.

In a past life, he had done so too, blinded not just by anger, but also envy and a feeling of abandonment because they were the reason his brother left and he had no pity or mercy to spare them.

“I think for our generation at least, the name Wen will hold more hatred than anything else,” she says.

Jiang Cheng can’t gainsay that. Many of the Wens who have settled among the refugees of Lotus Pier had moved back to Qishan after the war, but a few have stayed behind. Jiang Cheng is almost afraid to check who has stayed behind because he doesn’t think he can bear it if he sees a familiar toddler there.

The way he treated that child when he first saw him is always a regret, and it had intensified in later years whenever he has seen Lan Sizhui.

Not that he ill-treated him, but he had been angry, and he knows children better now than he did then, and knows that a child would have sensed it.

Hopefully, that child will be safer in this life.

Even more hopefully Hanguang Jun won’t have to give such a ridiculous name to a kid this time around.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Lan Wangji is surprised by Jin Ling

Twenty

Chapter Summary

Lan Wangji is annoyed, but also rethinking some of his prejudices

Chapter Notes

It's been a bad mental health day, and I almost considered not posting today coz I feel like crap and have no energy, but it's already written and it's just a copy paste, so here it is.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

When he is in an uncharitable mood, Lan Wangji wishes that his husband didn't care so much for Jiang Wanyin or Jin Rulan. It is a feeling wholly separate from his hatred of Jiang Wanyin and his budding dislike for Jin Rulan. He knows it is uncharitable to hold Jin Rulan accountable for the time he stabbed Wei Ying, because all Jin Rulan knew at the time was that Wei Ying was responsible for his parents' death. Lan Wangji knows who to thank for Jin Rulan growing up believing that.

If a tiny voice in his head reminds him that Wei Ying is definitely responsible for Jin Zixuan's death, Lan Wangji has got quite good at ignoring it.

Besides, it was Wen Ning who had killed him, and both Wei Ying and Wen Ning had saved Jin Rulan's life enough times for everyone to put Jin Zixuan's death behind them.

And now Jin Rulan has dragged Wei Ying into this mess and Wei Ying, as is usual with him, is about to do something potentially dangerous because he thinks it is the only way to bring Jiang Wanyin back.

"It is *dangerous*," Lan Wangji says again with emphasis.

"It *isn't*, Lan Zhan," Wei Ying says, patient. "Just because the array needs resentful energy and more power doesn't mean that it is *dangerous*. I know my current body is weaker than my former one, but this one has a golden core, and the resentful energy that I plan to use is very less, so it's not dangerous at all."

Thing is Lan Wangji knows Wei Ying, knows how he talks too fast and uses too many words, so that Lan Wangji can't keep up. He always does it when he's going to do something particularly dangerous or something he knows Lan Wangji won't like. Lan Wangji doesn't

wish to control his husband, and contrary to what Jin Rulan says, he has no wish to keep him prisoner or even apart from his family. He only wishes Wei Ying to have a care for his own safety, and for the state of his heart, and for his family to do the same. Wei Ying's heart is even more fragile than this body he inhabits now, and needs so much care.

He wishes that Jiang Wanyin and Jin Rulan just understood that, and behaved accordingly.

"Wei gonzi," Xiongzhong speaks, steady and gentle as always. "Are you sure this will not be harmful to you? If you get hurt in any way... I do not wish to see Wangji suffer again."

He has missed this, Lan Wangji thinks. The way Xiongzhong cares, the way he puts in words the thoughts that are in Lan Wangji's mind, and unable to articulate. But Lan Wangji also wishes that his brother is not there. Xiongzhong has not been the same since Guanyin temple, his year in seclusion seeming to have only added to the weight on his shoulders. Lan Wangji has tried to help, but he lacks words, and Xiongzhong has always been so protective of him.

He suspects that Xiongzhong came out of seclusion too soon because Lan Wangji's lack of words weren't enough to fulfil his needs for conversation, and Shufu has always been matter of fact.

He worries about the letters between Xiongzhong and Nie Huaisang too. Nie Huaisang has lied to Xiongzhong as much as Jin Guangyao did, and used him to cause Jin Guangyao's death. Lan Wangji doesn't know how Xiongzhong can even bear to look at him in the face, and how Nie Huaisang dares.

"Zewu Jun," Wei Ying says, honest this time. "There is a risk, of course, but is more due to the fact that we don't know where he is rather than with the process itself."

"What do you mean we don't know where he is?" Jin Rulan asks, sounding anxious.

"We have tried four times now," Wei Ying says. "The array works perfectly, but it is just that... his mind, soul, what have you, is not in this world anymore. If it were, I would have found it by now. The connection of his soul to his golden core is there, but it is very weak, and it wouldn't be if he were in this world."

"What do you mean he's not in this world?" Jin Rulan's voice is high, fists clenched. "He's not... He is here!"

"Jin Ling," Wei Ying says quietly. "I know."

"Wei Ying," Lan Wangji says because if Jiang Wanyin's soul is not here, how does Wei Ying expect to find it?

"The modified array will utilise the connection to take me wherever he is," Wei Ying says, as if aware of Lan Wangji's doubts, and it only appals Lan Wangji more.

"Wei Ying," he says again. "It's dangerous."

"Lan Zhan," Wei Ying smiles at him, but it is full of sorrow. "He is still alive. Wherever he is, it is somewhere that is safe for a soul; I'll be fine."

“Dajiu,” Jin Rulan says, so much worry on his face. “If it’s dangerous, don’t do it.”

Lan Wangji stares, because that is not what he expected Jin Rulan to say. He would have expected the man to demand Wei Ying to do it immediately, to bring his uncle back, but instead the boy is telling him not to take a risk.

“Aiya, Jin Ling,” Wei Ying says in that careless way he has, a smile crinkling the corners of his eyes. “I already said there is no danger.”

“What if you can’t come back too?” Jin Rulan asks. “Maybe it is safe in the sense that you won’t die, but what if... what if it’s a place that traps souls? I... I can’t lose you too, Dajiu.”

“Hey,” Wei Ying goes to his nephew to hug him, and Jin Rulan clings to him, and sobs. “I’ll be fine, Jin Ling. You don’t have to worry about me. I’m the Yiling Laozu. Even death couldn’t hold me.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Jin Rulan mutters, but doesn’t let go. “But Dajiu... you’re the only family I have now, and... and I can’t lose you too... not even to get Jiujiu back.”

Lan Wangji has to revise some of his opinions on the young Jin Sect Leader. The young man genuinely cares for Wei Ying, and it seems he will even give up a chance to bring his beloved uncle back so that Wei Ying won’t risk himself.

Much can be forgiven for someone who loves Wei Ying as much as that.

“Jin Ling,” Wei Ying takes a step back so he can look at his nephew’s eyes. He is so much shorter than Jin Rulan, but it doesn’t matter with how he is looking at the younger man. “I am not doing this for *you*.”

The breath punches out of Lan Wangji’s chest, and his heart aches.

“You *have* to come back,” Jin Rulan says fiercely. “If you can’t find him or... or bring him back... you still have to *come back*.”

Wei Ying smiles, eyes soft and warm. “*Of course* I’ll come back, and I’ll bring Jiang Cheng back as well.”

“Wei qianbei,” Sizhui says, looking worried as well. “Baba... are you sure about this?”

Wei Ying smiles, brilliant as ever as he moves from his nephew’s side to check the array once more. “Aiya, why are you all so worried? Have you no faith in me? I promise I’ll be fine.”

“You better be,” Jin Rulan’s scowl is an exact replica of his uncle’s, as is the gruff tone of his voice. “I don’t have that much family left that I can afford to risk the ones I have.”

Wei Ying stills, his eyes darting from Jin Rulan to Sizhui before he smiles again. “I promise I’ll be fine,” he says.

It takes Lan Wangji a minute to realise that he had heard words similar to the ones Jin Rulan has spoken before. Sizhui had said almost the exact same thing when he said he wanted Jiang

Wanyin to be his uncle.

Lan Wangji looks at how close Jin Rulan and Sizhui are standing, and a frisson of alarm goes through him. He and Wei Ying had suffered enough judgement in their lives that cut sleeve doesn't even *begin* to track. But Jin Rulan is a Sect Leader and Sizhui is a Sect Heir, and he cannot imagine the kind of fallout if anyone else were to suspect.

Looking at the two of them now, almost unconsciously angled towards each other, he cannot believe that he has never before noticed it.

“We’re back!” Jingyi announces as he walks in with Ouyang Zizhen, and Lan Wangji has another epiphany, as he notices the way Sizhui’s and Jin Rulan’s eyes soften and the warm smiles on Ouyang Zizhen’s and Jingyi’s faces.

Lan Wangji thinks that if he had any kind of alcohol tolerance, he would be drowning himself in wine right now. He looks at Wei Ying, and sees that Wei Ying is looking at the juniors as well. He wants to ask if Wei Ying sees the same thing that he does, but doesn’t.

“We should be able to use the array tomorrow,” Wei Ying says, turning his attention back to it.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Some brotherly bonding between Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian, aka the last fluffy moment before shit hits the fan

Twenty One

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian attend a dinner, take a walk, and have a talk

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Jiang Cheng is bored out of his mind by the time Wei Wuxian arrives in the evening before the hunt. He is among the last, and though Jiang Cheng had spent a pleasant morning with his sister, he couldn't monopolise her time.

"Jiang Cheng," his brother yells and flings himself at him, but with less force than either of them is used to, so Jiang Cheng just has to brace himself a bit.

He attempts a bow since they are in public, but Wei Wuxian is going for a hug, so that's what happens.

Jin Ziyao bows and smiles. "I have put you in rooms next to each other, Jiang Zongzhu," he says, sounding amused. "You also have a shared balcony."

"Sounds fun," Wei Wuxian says cheerfully as he releases Jiang Cheng to bow to Jin Ziyao. "Lead the way. I need to have a bath and change if I'm to make an appearance at dinner."

The Jiang Sect has an entire wing to themselves. They have brought only twenty people, the rest needing to stay back at Lotus Pier. The border patrols aren't as necessary now, but they still keep them.

Dinner is a noisy affair, and Jiang Cheng is seated at the head table with all the Sect Leaders and their families. Lan Wangji keeps looking at where Wei Wuxian sits between Jiang Cheng and A-Jie, and he looks displeased every time Wei Wuxian slumps against Jiang Cheng, or knocks him with his shoulder or steals from his plate.

Well, they steal from each other's plates, as they had always done since they were boys.

But Lan Wangji doesn't seem to like it at all.

Jiang Cheng thinks despairingly that he has to do something about the silent mutual pining competition his brother and Lan Wangji seems to have embarked upon. It is bad enough having had to live through it once already; he doesn't have the endurance to go through it again.

He has no idea how to actually say the words to Wei Wuxian, though. His brother is extremely oblivious to things that are obvious to everyone else. Like the fact that Lan Wangji is ready to glare to death anyone who comes too close to Wei Wuxian even if they're his siblings. There's also the fact that Wei Wuxian even seems oblivious to the fact that *he* is pining over Lan Wangji.

Jiang Cheng pours himself some wine. His alcohol tolerance is fortunately still high, and he doesn't want to be sober for the conversation he's steeling himself to have with his brother later.

Dinner drags on, but like all tortures, it too comes to an end. They all disperse, the Lans to their beds, he assumes, and Jin Ziyao lingers at Nie Mingjue's side. He pulls Wei Wuxian towards the doors, but not in time not to see Nie Mingjue's hand skim over the braids Jin Ziyao is wearing.

"Doesn't your brother mind this?" he asks.

Jiang Cheng is out of the room with Wei Wuxian and in one of the balconies before Jin Ziyao can answer.

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian whines. "Let's go down to the gardens," He turns and Jiang Cheng sees that the twin Jades of Lan are behind them. "Lan Zhan, we're going for a walk. Care to join us?"

"No," Lan Wangji says, cold and formal, but Jiang Cheng can see that he's just jealous and angry because he's jealous.

Lans and all their stupid rules.

"Come on," Jiang Cheng says gruffly as he catches his brother's arm and pulls him towards the stairs. They walk down, and are in the gardens soon. There are small lanterns everywhere, like fireflies in the velvety dark. They frame trees and bushes, and larger ones hang from arched vines, illuminating the path.

They find a pond stocked with golden carps and sits down by it as if by mutual agreement. There is a tree near the pond, its leaves carpeting the grassy floor underneath and a few floats on the water. They both lean against it.

"Are you going to take part in the archery competition at least?" Wei Wuxian asks.

"I don't mind sitting out," Jiang Cheng says. "But I will participate if you think I should."

"You should," Wei Wuxian says.

Archery is something Jiang Cheng can do even without spiritual powers. Competitions like this often have rules prohibiting the use of spiritual powers so that only skill is measured.

Wei Wuxian looks tired this close, shadows bruising under his eyes, stark against his pale skin.

“You look tired,” Jiang Cheng says.

“I haven’t slept well for the last couple of nights,” he admits quietly. “Nightmares and stuff.”

Jiang Cheng nods. He has difficulty sleeping himself. That is one reason why they still share a bed and talk till they pass out.

“A-Jie looks so happy,” Wei Wuxian murmurs. “I never thought I would like the peacock, but if he makes A-Jie that happy, I guess I can try and tolerate him.”

“He’s not half bad,” Jiang Cheng says. “And you really should stop calling him the peacock. You’re both Sect Leaders now.”

“I’ll call my future brother-in-law whatever I want,” Wei Wuxian declares as he shifts closer and puts his head on Jiang Cheng’s shoulder, before saying in a low voice. “I hate the thought of her leaving.”

“Me too,” Jiang Cheng says, honestly. “But isn’t this why we decided that *you* should be the Sect Leader and not her?”

“I so *hate* being a Sect Leader,” Wei Wuxian says, shuddering. “Sect Leaders Ouyang and Yao visited yesterday,” he adds. “Did you know that Sect Leader Yao can talk continuously without even drawing breath for a whole shichen?”

Jiang Cheng snorts. He has experienced that particular torture a few times, and thinks he prefers the discipline whip. “And what was he talking about?”

“Fuck if I know,” Wei Wuxian says. “Ouyang Zongzhu dozed off and I worked on a talisman, and hummed every now and then.” Wei Wuxian grins then, cheerful and with unholy amusement lighting up his face. “At the end of it, he asked what I thought, and I said it wasn’t quite clear to me yet, and does he mind repeating it?”

Jiang Cheng starts laughing, and Wei Wuxian joins in. Jiang Cheng tries to imagine Sect Leader Yao having to repeat his own self-important declarations, and completely loses it.

“You know what we need right now?” Wei Wuxian asks, wiping his eyes.

“What?” Jiang Cheng asks.

“Wine,” Wei Wuxian says promptly, “And a pier on which we can lie down and watch the lotuses and the moon and talk.”

“There’s a pond,” Jiang Cheng waves towards it. “And carp.”

“But I can’t push you in,” Wei Wuxian pouts.

“What are you, five?” Jiang Cheng asks, still laughing.

“Xianxian is three,” Wei Wuxian declares, holding up three fingers. “And Chengcheng is being mean to me.”

They both dissolve into laughter again.

“I asked Shijie once,” Wei Wuxian says after a moment. “Why anyone should like someone like that,” he clarified. “I mean, wouldn’t it be like putting a halter around one’s own neck?”

“And what did she say?” Jiang Cheng asks.

“Said three is a bit much, and Xianxian should be one,” Wei Wuxian sounds disgruntled, and Jiang Cheng laughs again. He remembers that an exact same conversation has happened in his previous life as well.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says after a while. “Have you ever liked anyone that way?”

“Can’t say that I have,” Jiang Cheng says. “Have you?”

“I’m not sure,” Wei Wuxian mutters. “How do you even know anyway?”

Jiang Cheng grimaces. “You’re asking the wrong person, here. You should ask A-Jie.”

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says quietly. “What will you do if you fall in love with someone?”

Jiang Cheng is actually impressed that his brother speaks the words fall in love without stammering that he almost misses the question.

“Tell them, I suppose,” he says.

“Do you remember the list of requirements you had for a bride?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“You mean the list that my mother thought would be ideal in a bride for her son?” Jiang Cheng asks wryly.

Wei Wuxian frowns. “So what is *your* requirement?”

Jiang Cheng thinks for a moment. Despite all his stringent requirements in his past life, there was only one among all that he was really serious about. Of course, in this life, there is no Jin Ling, and even if he will be, there will be no need for Jiang Cheng to take care of him since he will have his parents.

“I don’t have any,” Jiang Cheng says.

“Why not?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“It doesn’t seem important,” Jiang Cheng says, wondering what this is about. “Wei Wuxian, you better not be planning to marry me off for political gain or something.”

“Nah,” Wei Wuxian shakes his head, looking offended. “Not unless you *want* to marry someone.”

“I don’t want to marry *anyone*,” Jiang Cheng says firmly.

“What if someone wants to marry you?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“I’m not marrying out of the sect,” Jiang Cheng says decisively. “I’m not in love with anyone and I promised to help you, so I’m not leaving and we can’t really afford to have anyone marrying *in*, so,” He shrugged. “Better resign ourselves to permanent bachelorhood.”

Wei Wuxian mock-punches him on the shoulder, and they fall silent again.

“Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian mumbles after a bit, his head leaning against Jiang Cheng’s chest. “I think I may like someone that way.”

Jiang Cheng snorts at that. “I know,” he says, but though he keeps his voice low, he can’t keep his amusement out of it. “I was almost getting tired of the silent mutual pining going on between the two of you, as annoying as that was.”

“What- mutual?” Wei Wuxian’s voice is high and his eyes wide as he lifts his head to stare at Jiang Cheng.

“Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng sighs. “You’re the smartest person I know, and you are quite observant when it suits you, but you are also the biggest moron in the world if you honestly think that your feelings are unrequited.”

Wei Wuxian opens and closes his mouth a few times before saying in a strangled voice. “It’s *impossible* for my feelings to be requited. I’ve never... I’m not *that* blind, Jiang Cheng!”

“You are,” Jiang Cheng states. “Also, why should it be impossible?” He sits straighter and catches Wei Wuxian’s shoulder. “Why do you think that it should be so impossible for anyone other than me and A-Jie to love you? Do you think so little of yourself?”

Wei Wuxian bites his lip, and mumbles after a moment. “At times I feel it should be impossible for even Shijie and you to love me.”

“You *moron*,” Jiang Cheng murmurs, his heart aching. He takes one of Wei Wuxian’s hands and places it over his lower dantian where his golden core once was. “Is that proof enough for you, Wei Wuxian?” he asks gently, as Wei Wuxian’s hand curls. “Or do you think I’ll let myself be captured by the Wens for a lark? Or because I thought I owed you something? I did it because I love you, you idiot, and I’d rather lose my golden core than lose you.”

After all, he has had almost a life time of bad decisions and sorrow and pain to realise that he would rather have his brother than his golden core.

“Why aren’t you *angry*?” Wei Wuxian whispers, his voice breaking. “*I* am the reason you lost your core... Why aren’t you angry with me?”

“Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. “I won’t say this again, so you better listen. *You aren’t responsible for what happened to me*. I made the decision to let the Wen Patrol capture me than you. *Wen Zhuliu* melted my golden core. *Wen Chao* tortured and whipped me. You are *not* the one responsible for any of those things. So, don’t you *dare* blame yourself for this. And don’t you *dare* insult me by implying that I am *not* capable of making and *owning* my

own fucking decisions. I love you. You are my brother, no matter what my mother used to say or think, and I will always love you, no matter what.”

After all, Wei Wuxian had already done his worst to Jiang Cheng and yet, Jiang Cheng hadn’t managed to hate him.

He doesn’t think he ever will.

“A-Cheng,” Wei Wuxian mutters, voice breaking again.

“A-Xian,” Jiang Cheng says softly. “I know what I’m talking about. Your feelings aren’t unrequited.” He smirks. “Though considering all things, there’s no way on earth you can afford to have him marry into the Sect.”

“Maybe we’ll elope,” Wei Wuxian pouts.

“Try it and I’ll break both your legs,” Jiang Cheng threatens. “If we’re doing this, we’re doing it properly. Maybe we should talk to A-Jie and get her to help before we lose her for good. Also, we are still in mourning.”

“Is there anyone who’s *not* in mourning?” Wei Wuxian mutters.

“It’s a good thing, if you ask me,” Jiang Cheng says. “Gives us some time to consolidate things.”

“Our finances are improving,” Wei Wuxian says, “But yes, it’s not enough.”

“It’s not enough *yet*,” Jiang Cheng amends. “But we’re over the worst of it, Wei Wuxian. Things will only get better.”

“You don’t mind?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“Why should I?” Jiang Cheng responds. “I just want you to be happy, you idiot.”

“And what will you do when Shijie and I are both married?”

“I’ll spoil all my nephews and nieces,” Jiang Cheng says and he misses Jin Ling so fiercely that his breath catches.

“What if you fall in love with someone too?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“Let’s worry about that if and when it happens.” Jiang Cheng says, and Wei Wuxian doesn’t argue.

Next up: Lan Xichen makes a few realisations, talks to his brother and ponders on some things

Twenty Two

Chapter Summary

Wei Wuxian has an accident, and Jiang Cheng has a conversation with himself

Chapter Notes

So, things are starting to happen, and there is a time skip here.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“Ouch! Fuck!” Wei Wuxian swears, and Jiang Cheng drops the hammer he is using to take a look at Wei Wuxian’s thumb, feeling the injured digit.

“It’s broken,” he says, sighing. “What the fuck, Wei Wuxian, why are you like this? Did you use *spiritual power to hammer in a nail*?”

He can’t stop his voice from rising, so annoyed is he. It’s not like Wei Wuxian is doing this for the first time, even though it has been a while. It’s been four years since the end of the war and one of the old docks that had still remained standing after the Wen attack had rotted away and needed replacement. Naturally, Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian had got working on it, and now Wei Wuxian has smashed his thumb with the hammer like a fucking amateur.

“I’ll get a healer,” he says, leading Wei Wuxian to one of the pavilions. “Don’t fucking use your spiritual energy to heal it. You may set the bones wrong.”

“Aiya, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian mutters, a soft smile on his lips, and something misty in his eyes. “You don’t have to fuss about me.”

Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes. “Are we sliding back then?” he asks. “Did your engagement affect your brain or something?”

Wei Wuxian chuckles and shakes his head, blushing a bit. “Go get the healer, then. I’ll just sit here and watch the lake.”

Yang Kuo is in the infirmary and follows Jiang Cheng to the pier. Wei Wuxian is holding his thumb and staring out into the lake with a brooding look on his face.

“Zongzhu,” Yang Kuo shakes his head as he takes Wei Wuxian’s hand, and examines it. “You have literally shattered both the bones in your thumb.” He glares at Jiang Cheng. “Jiang gonzi, have a better care for your Zongzhu.”

“It’s not *his* fault!” Wei Wuxian says, automatically, and Jiang Cheng suppresses a laugh.

Yang Kuo had come up with the ingenious idea of telling him or A-Jie off for any mishap Wei Wuxian got into which has made him careful about himself in turn. So far, Wei Wuxian has not caught on to it, and it won’t do if Jiang Cheng is to give it away.

“I’ll do that, daifu,” he says. “This one apologises.”

“*Jiang Cheng!*” Wei Wuxian hisses, upset as always. “That was my fault, not yours!”

“You’re the Sect Leader,” Yang Kuo says. “It’s for *everyone* to ensure that you’re safe. If you get hurt while with one of us, it is our fault for not being quick enough to prevent it.”

“How is he supposed to prevent me smashing my thumb with a stupid hammer?” Wei Wuxian pouts as Yang Kuo bows and leaves without replying.

“By not allowing you to pick up the hammer in the first place,” Jiang Cheng says. “I’ll finish the dock, Wei Wuxian. You just sit there and rest.”

“Nah, my thumb is okay, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian says when a disciple approaches with a letter.

“Zongzhu,” she bows. “The reply from Wen Zongzhu has arrived.”

“Ah,” Jiang Cheng says as Wei Wuxian takes the sealed letter, and stares at it with a frown on his face. He can understand the reluctance, but he hopes that the reply is positive, that Wen Qing has agreed to their request.

Wei Wuxian smiles at the disciple. “Dismissed,” he says, and she leaves.

“Aren’t you going to open it?” Jiang Cheng asks.

Wei Wuxian frowns. “Should I?”

“Or you can just wait till the Discussion Conference in Koi Tower next month,” Jiang Cheng says. “Wen Qing will be there, and you can tell her that you were too afraid to open her letter, so she can tell her reply to you in person.”

“It’s not- I’m not afraid!”

“Look,” Jiang Cheng says. “I know this means a great deal to us, but... even if she has said no, we have a chance to talk to her and maybe convince her in person during the Discussion Conference.”

Wei Wuxian blows out a breath, and opens the letter. He reads through it once, and lifts his head to stare at Jiang Cheng as if he has grown another head.

“What?” Jiang Cheng asks, worried now.

Wei Wuxian holds out the letter, and Jiang Cheng takes it, scanning its contents quickly. “She has agreed,” he says. “The Wens who have decided to make their home in Lotus Pier can have their ancestral tablets brought here. She says she and Wen Ning will arrange to have them brought to Koi Tower when they’re there for the Discussion Conference.” He looks up at his brother. “Why do you look like it’s the end of the world, you dumbass? You had me worried there for a moment.”

He flicks Wei Wuxian’s forehead, and hands the letter back.

“I’m just...” Wei Wuxian blinks back tears as he looks at the letter. His hands are trembling. “Overwhelmed, I think.”

He almost crumples to the ground, and Jiang Cheng sits down next to him. “You thought she was going to refuse, didn’t you?” he asks. He puts an arm around Wei Wuxian. “You should go and tell them. They’ll want to hear this from you.”

“I...” Wei Wuxian starts, and shakes his head. “What if I... what if I break down?”

“Pretty sure we’re all used to you doing that *frequently* by now,” Jiang Cheng says, unable to stop teasing. “Even if you haven’t done it since A-Ling’s birth. But enough with all that. Go and tell them. I can finish the dock by myself.”

“It was supposed to be the two of us together, before my marriage,” Wei Wuxian pouts.

Jiang Cheng grins. “Well, after your marriage, you can get your husband to repair and scrub docks with us. After all, we had to nearly bankrupt ourselves to meet the Lan’s price.”

“Not like he hasn’t done it with us before,” Wei Wuxian digs an elbow into Jiang Cheng’s ribs lightly. “All right, I’ll go and tell the Wens the good news, and then I’ll come back and help you. No more smashing thumbs, I promise. I can’t have my brother get blamed after all.” Wei Wuxian pauses on the way to his feet. “Jiang Cheng,” he says, crouching back down. “I... are you happy?”

Jiang Cheng is surprised. “Is there any reason why I shouldn’t be?”

“No, it’s just...” Wei Wuxian leans his forehead on Jiang Cheng’s shoulder. “I love you,” he says quietly. “I’m lucky to have a brother like you.”

“Enough already, or I’ll throw you into the lake,” Jiang Cheng says, but he smiles too. “I love you too, you idiot. Now, scram.”

Jiang Cheng sits back once Wei Wuxian was gone, and placed a hand over his chest. He has been aware for a while that the other him is still there. The him who should have been here. It has been unsettling at first, but he’s used to it now. The knowledge of his presence, even if it is just himself in another time, makes Jiang Cheng feels guilty, makes him feel like he has stolen this life, this happiness for himself.

You didn’t. I would have messed it up.

You don’t know that.

I do. I've seen your memories. That was me too, and that would have happened if not for you.

I only did it for him.

I know, and I understand.

Jiang Cheng sighs as he returns to his work. It is more than guilt, though. There is an ache in his chest, an empty feeling that has intensified since the birth of Jin Ling in this time. He loves him dearly, but he cannot stop missing the other one, the one whom he raised, the man who thinks he should now fight Jiang Cheng's battles because he's an adult now.

He *wants* to go home to his nephew.

He even misses the three morons who have chosen his nephew.

And to be perfectly honest, he misses *his* Wei Wuxian. Even with all the issues that gape between them, a chasm neither can cross, he misses him.

If I leave, will you take care of him, and yourself as well?

Yes, but do you have to leave?

I don't know if I can... I don't even know how I came here in the first place... but... I want to. I miss my Jin Ling.

And perhaps it is time for the Jiang Cheng of this world to live, to find his own way without a road map, to find himself. He has done what he can, and he wants to go back now, meet his nephew, and his friends who all think they're being subtle, but are so fucking obvious it's a surprise no one else has noticed it yet.

He wants to be there to cow everyone into submission when it inevitably comes out, wants to stand between his nephew, his friends (lovers?) and the world as he has always done.

I understand, comes a very soft reply.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Sizhui is worried, and then sad.

Twenty Three

Chapter Summary

Lan Xichen is a tired man

Chapter Notes

So, this should have been posted before the previous one, as someone pointed out, and I'm so sorry about that, but overall, it doesn't make much difference to the story line. You all still get the Sizhui chapter next.

Lan Xichen studies the array. Wei Wuxian has always been a genius, and this array is yet another thing that proves it. Jiang Wanyin lies inside it, and Wei Wuxian is crouching next to him, making some last-minute adjustments. The Jiang Sect leader looks younger like this, more vulnerable, all his hard edges softened into something more human. Without the ever-present scowl, one could appreciate the delicate features that he inherited from his mother.

Xichen glances over at where Wangji stands, his worry evident. The four youngsters are at their designated places, and the Jiang Senior Disciple as well. Xichen wonders at the familiarity the four juniors have with Lotus Pier and its inhabitants, and if the loud and boisterous conversations during dinners when Sizhui and Jingyi seem to forget the Lan rules are to be believed, they are just as familiar with Koi Tower, and with Baling.

Now that he thinks of it, Jin Rulan and Ouyang Zizhen has been at Cloud Recesses more frequently than is strictly necessary for two sect leaders.

It is good that the four are such good friends, Xichen decides. And even if there is something more there, and even if it has all the makings of a political disaster, Xichen will still support them. Not that he has any authority over Jin Rulan or Ouyang Zizhen. Both Sect Leaders are adults now, and answerable to no one but their Sect elders. Xichen has seen first-hand how Jiang Wanyin has once cowed the Jin elders when they had tried to pressure Jin Rulan into marrying a Jin cousin whom they thought would be a good match.

He wonders if Jiang Wanyin is aware of his nephew's relationship with the three other young men. It is a lot to wrap his head around, but Xichen has been around the young men for a while now, and none of them are as subtle as they think. Oh, they are not like Wei Wuxian and Wangji: they don't touch each other, or hold hands or make innuendos in the guise of innocent remarks, and Xichen is fairly certain he won't walk around a corner to see them kissing or worse.

But it is in the way they look at one another, the way their bodies are always angled towards one another, the way they speak one another's names, the smile that lurks in their eyes. Xichen can only marvel at the tenacity and courage of these youngsters, and at how they have carved this out, this space in their busy lives, and have kept it for themselves.

"Wei Ying," Wangji says. "Let me come with you at least."

"Ah, Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian says, his voice as soft as his eyes as they look at his husband. "If there's a way to take you, I would, but... it will need even more power, and without you... no, it's best this way."

Xichen agrees. Even if there were not resentful energy involved, Wangji is needed to power the array. As Wei Wuxian had put it so inelegantly, but accurately, the array needs a stupid amount of power. It doesn't *drain* any of them, but still leaves them all tired. Once it activates though, they can stop putting energy into it. It will sustain itself till Wei Wuxian is back.

Wei Wuxian sits and plays Chenqing till resentful energy curls around its edges. He nods at them and lies down. By this time, they all know what to do, how much power it needs, when to stop and to step back and to have Zhou daifu examine them.

She is standing before the closed door, the room locked and warded with privacy talismans. Once Wei Wuxian is gone, it is a waiting game. Xichen prefers to leave the room and take a walk, and the Juniors don't stay either. Wangji stays, though, and he and Zhou daifu are the only ones who do. Zhang Xiu has duties to attend to, and most of the people in and around Lotus Pier still think that Jiang Wanyin is recovering from an injury sustained during a night hunt.

Honestly, Xichen is impressed with how *no one* outside Lotus Pier has even got a whiff of what's really happening. Not even Huaisang whose latest letter complains about how no one has visited him in a while and how he's bored out of his mind. He cannot leave the Unclean realm yet, he complains, because it is taking him more time than he has realised to break from tradition and to retire their sabre cultivation for good. There is no news as to what they're shifting to yet, though. Huaisang is being quite cagey about it.

The array powers up, and Xichen steps back, sagging. He makes his way to Zhou daifu who checks his qi and meridians and tells him to rest and have some food. Xichen thanks her and leaves, but goes to Wangji. Food can wait.

"He'll come back, Wangji," he says softly.

"Wei Ying says..." Wangji stops, and looks down on where his hands lie clenched on his lap. "Wei Ying says that he needs Jiang Wanyin, that the past doesn't matter, that... that I shouldn't..."

"Wangji," Xichen murmurs, his heart aching for his brother.

"He says that if I... if I can't get along with Jiang Wanyin, that he won't... ask me, but he needs him, and," He frowns. "I don't like it, but if that will make Wei Ying happy, then I will try."

He looks around him. “He asked me to talk to Zhang Xiu, and to Jin Rulan, to ask them why Jiang Wanyin took the decisions he did.”

“And did you talk to them?”

Wangji’s eyes move to the still form of his husband. “Not yet,” he says, his voice quiet.

Xichen wants to give Wangji a pat on the shoulder, or just to hug him, but his brother has never welcomed casual touches even from him. Wei Wuxian is the only one whom he allows such liberties on his person. He hasn’t even allowed Sizhui to hug him once the boy moved past childhood. Wangji has never been comfortable with anyone in his space, or touching him, and even with Wei Wuxian, Xichen has never got the feeling that he welcomes it.

“Are you going to?” he asks.

Wangji nods. Xichen rises. “Then I’ll leave you to it. It’s a beautiful day to be cooped up in here.”

He finds his way to a pier, and sits down, folding his legs underneath. The day is bright, and the Lotus Flowers are in bloom, and Xichen relaxes as he closes his eyes, and tries to meditate, shifting his pose.

“They’ll be all right, Jin Ling,” Jingyi’s voice brings him out of the meditative state he had fallen into. The sun is high, and he realises that at least half a shichen has passed. He cannot see the younger men and has to assume they must be around the corner. He stands up, and stretches before making his way to the pavilion where they usually have lunch.

The young men are there, as he had anticipated. “Zewu Jun,” They bow to him.

He bows in return, watches them, as he sits slightly apart.

“Has Wangji eaten?” he asks as he transfers some vegetables on to his bowl.

“Zhang Xiu has taken his meal to him,” Jin Rulan says. He looks more worried than usual, and Xichen can guess the reason.

“I’m sure your uncle knows what he’s doing, Jin Zongzhu,” he says, choosing not to start the meal yet.

Jin Rulan snorts. “Not from what I’ve heard.”

“He’s always been brilliant,” Xichen says, offended on Wangji’s husband’s behalf, before starting to eat because it looks like everyone is waiting for him.

“And yet a moron,” Jin Rulan says dismissively. “Jiujiu has told me a lot of stories about him, though not as much since he came back to life. Anyway, he was a genius, but also an idiot and Jiujiu says he has no sense of self-preservation.”

Xichen doesn’t choke on his food, and is glad for the rule about not speaking because he isn’t sure how he should respond to that. That Jiang Wanyin should have told his nephew stories

about Wei Wuxian is itself a surprise; stories about his *brother* and not the Yiling Laozu is even more of one.

Why would he have done that unless he cared?

But if he did, then why did he kill him?

Or didn't he?

Xichen feels ashamed of never having asked, of never bothering enough to find out, of accepting what rumours said without question.

It is too late now, twenty-one years too late, and Xichen won't even know how to ask anyway. Besides, it is for Wangji and Wei Wuxian to build bridges with the Jiang Sect Leader, not for him. He is still curious about what Zhang Xiu or Jin Rulan can know about the man's past decisions. There are many things he knows due to his position, and his attendance at various conferences and meetings where Jiang Wanyin has also been in attendance, but he gets a feeling that there is more to this. He understands having to choose his Sect over his brother, but even for his Sect, he wouldn't have tried to kill Wangji.

Jiang Wanyin has become an enigma whereas once Lan Xichen had believed he knew the man. The chatter of the juniors flows over him, and he ponders this new puzzle that is in front of him right now.

Twenty Four

Chapter Summary

Lan Sizhui worries, learns a few things, and worries even more

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sizhui sits on the floor, with Zizhen and Jin Ling flanking him, and Jingyi on Jin Ling's other side. It has been three shichens since the array has been powered and Wei qianbei has not woken up yet. Sizhui tries not to look at where Hanguang Jun sits, impassive to the world, but not to Sizhui who can see the panic, the terror in his eyes. Not to Zewu Jun either who sits close to his brother, his anxious eyes on the array.

Zhou daifu sits slightly apart and next to her is Zhang Xiu. Three shichens, and they have been here for one, all of them, unable to distract themselves anymore. Sizhui's hand finds Jin Ling's slightly trembling one, and he squeezes it. Sizhui loves Wei qianbei, but right now he doesn't want to think of himself. If Wei qianbei doesn't return, he doesn't know how Hanguang Jun will survive it. He knows Jin Ling will blame himself.

And Sizhui feels anger stirring for the man who thought he can do such things, toy with his own life, as if *he* is *not* important, *not* loved. Wei qianbei may be Sizhui's father, but Sizhui is still angry with him for hurting Sizhui's other father, and Jin Ling who has lost so much already, and now must lose the last remaining member of his family too.

Wei qianbei gasps, stirs and sits up, the array powering down. Wei qianbei's breath is coming in gasps, and Jin Ling has pulled his hand free and is across the room just as quickly as Hanguang Jun.

"Dajiu!"

"Wei Ying!"

"I'm fine," Wei qianbei says, but he's not. Tears are flowing down his face, and his expression is devastated. "I'm fine," he repeats before breaking down, and sobbing into Hanguang Jun's chest.

"Dajiu," Jin Ling says, his voice thick with tears. "It's all right, Dajiu. You tried. It's all right."

And Sizhui wants to go to him, and hug him, because he is trying to comfort Wei qianbei when his heart must be breaking for his jiujiu.

“Let me have a look at him,” Zhou daifu says, as she moves towards them. “Hanguang Jun, let me examine him.”

Even if reluctantly, Hanguang Jun allows the healer to take Wei qianbei’s hand, to check his wrist.

“Wei Wuxian,” she says, her voice gentle. “I need to see your eyes.”

Wei qianbei draws a shuddering breath, and straightens. He wipes his eyes and turns to look at her. She examines them, and nods.

“Everything seems fine,” Zhou Daifu says and moves away from him.

Wei qianbei stands with Hanguang Jun’s help, and murmurs something to him. Hanguang Jun steps away looking concerned, Jin Ling still hovering close to Wei qianbei.

“Jin Ling,” Wei qianbei says, “I’m so sorry.”

“No, Dajiu,” Jin Ling shakes his head. “It’s all right. I’m glad you came back. It was a long shot anyway. Just... just don’t do such things anymore, all right? When I came to you for help, I wasn’t asking you to put yourself in danger.”

“I know,” Wei qianbei says quietly.

“Besides, Jiujiu will kill me if something happens to you,” Jin Ling continues.

“I know,” Wei qianbei whispers, and his eyes fill with tears again. He brushes them away with his hand, and shakes his head at Hanguang Jun. “There’s something I need to tell you all,” he says. “Lan Zhan, I am sitting with Jin Ling.”

Jingyi immediately moves to Zizhen’s other side, and Jin Ling takes his place next to Sizhui and Wei qianbei sits on his other side. Hanguang Jun sits next to Zewu Jun.

“I found out where Jiang Cheng is,” Wei qianbei says. “But... I couldn’t bring him home.”

“Where is he?” Jin Ling asks, and Sizhui wants to hold him because he can see he’s hurting so much.

“I don’t know how it happened,” Wei qianbei says. “And it’s... it’s sort of hard to believe, but... it seems he travelled to the past.”

There’s silence all around.

“To the past,” Jin Ling says.

“It seems he changed some things there, and created an alternate timeline,” Wei qianbei says.

“That makes a lot of sense,” Zizhen says from next to Sizhui. “That changes should create an alternate timeline, I mean.”

“Why is that?” Jin Ling asks, impatient as ever. “If he changes things, shouldn’t it reflect here, in our present?”

“No,” Zizhen shook his head. “For one, he goes from a present where bad things have happened, and if he changes them, then the bad things haven’t happened, and so the situation doesn’t arise where he has to go back, and if he doesn’t go back, then all the bad things happen, and it’s like an endless loop, so, alternate timeline.”

Sizhui can see that Wei qianbei is impressed and he is bursting with pride because Zizhen is so smart when he wants to be, and understands things much quicker than any of them.

“Huh. So, it creates another timeline,” Jin Ling says.

Zizhen nods. “While our timeline continues as it is, and therefore Jiang Zongzhu will have memories of this time but now he will have new memories too.” He looks at Wei qianbei. “It shouldn’t have been *possible* for you to come back here once you were there. You have been in the body of yourself in that time?”

Wei qianbei nods. “I was, and... I managed somehow to make myself be in the background of his mind, but if he’s me, he would have noticed something... anyway, I was there for a week, and returned only because I could feel the connection weakening.” He nodded at Zizhen. “That’s why I was able to return. My connection to his core.”

“Ah,” Zizhen says softly, as if he understands. “Jiang Zongzhu doesn’t have his core there.”

Wei qianbei shakes his head but not before Sizhui gasps and he can hear the same reaction from everyone. He sneaks a glance at Hanguang Jun who looks like someone has hit him over the head.

“Which,” Wei qianbei says, something dangerous in his voice, as he looks at Zhang gonzi and Zhou daifu. “Did you two know how he lost his core?”

The question confuses Sizhui and he can see that his friends are confused as well. Both Zewu Jun and Hanguang Jun are looking baffled as well.

Jin Ling is looking down, and his ears are red.

Whatever it is Wei qianbei is talking about, Jin Ling knows.

“I’ve known since the Sunshot,” Zhang gonzi says after a moment. “Everyone else who does died during the war.”

“I was not told the circumstances,” Zhou daifu says slowly. “Only what happened when I became the Head Healer here, almost ten years ago now. But I came to know of the circumstances later, and not from him.”

“I thought she needed to know when... after you came back and he found out it was your core,” Zhang gonzi says.

Wei qianbei nods. "I wondered at that time... I..." He shakes his head. "I am such an idiot... I... Why didn't he tell me?"

"Why didn't you tell *him*?" Jin Ling scowls. "I always said the two of you are idiots."

"But he told *him*," Wei qianbei mutters, sounding odd. "Me, I suppose, in that other timeline. *He* knows."

"Oh wow!" Zizhen says, a look of fascination on his face. "You are *jealous of yourself*."

Wei qianbei glares at Zizhen before laughing. "I guess I am at that," He wipes his eyes. "It's... he's had years to come to terms with it, and I've had barely hours..." He shakes his head. "I am an idiot," he says again. He looks at Jin Ling. "When did he tell you?"

Jin Ling scowls. "During a fight," he says. "It was a few months after I became Sect Leader, and I was pestering him to talk to you, and we got in a fight, and ... you know how he gets when he gets angry, but... I think he wanted me to know that he didn't *hate* you or anything."

"Wei Ying?" Hanguang Jun asks, and Sizhui is surprised that he has waited this long.

"Lan Zhan," Wei qianbei says, and he smiles at him. "Don't worry about it."

"Tell him," Jin Ling says. "Don't you know what secrets do by now? Tell him, for fuck's sake!"

"Wei Ying?" Hanguang Jun asks again.

Wei qianbei draws a deep breath. "He... he got himself captured by the Wens purposely because they were going to capture me otherwise."

Sizhui sees the shock on his father's face, the way Jingyi's mouth falls open, the gasp from Zizhen and Zewu Jun, and his heart hurts for Wei qianbei and for Shufu who did that and in the end got blamed for losing his core, and for Wei qianbei's decision to give his core to him.

Wei qianbei rushed on, as if afraid of the silence. "It makes a lot of sense, you know. I wondered... when I... when I went back to Lotus Pier, looking for him... I thought... I couldn't understand how it is he could move so fast because I didn't stop or rest... I was just pushing on, and I remembered thinking how he could have been so quick... but of course... that was because he was *taken* by them." A sob broke from him, "And I... I..."

"You were angry with him," Jin Ling says quietly. "You blamed him, resented that you had to be the one to pay the price for his carelessness."

Wei qianbei looks aghast as he turns to stare at Jin Ling. "He *knew*?"

"He guessed. After he found out about the core," Jin Ling says quietly, "He said it makes sense with how you were behaving during and after the war." Jin Ling shrugs. "I think he was actually relieved to have a reason other than that you just hated him. What? Did you think he wouldn't understand?"

“I don’t know what I thought,” Wei qianbei mutters. “For... for a few years after I came back, I was... I was trying to make sense of everything that went down between us, and... I soon realised that I was wrong to think he ever hated me, or... or anything like that. I just... I didn’t want to push, Jin Ling, not if... I was the one who told him it was all in the past.”

“That’s why you had to be the one to make the first move,” Jin Ling sounds tired. “It took me some time to understand that too.”

“Wei qianbei,” Jingyi says. “If Jiang Zongzhu doesn’t have his core in that time, and... things are different... what did he do?”

“I don’t think he did much, or at least not that the other me is aware of. Stopped me from giving him my core, and I think he cheated? Used his prior knowledge to win us the Sunshot campaign without demonic cultivation. But other than that... everything’s changed, but none of it seems to be of his making.”

“So, what’s different?” Sizhui asks, a tiny hope in his heart. Maybe Jiang Zongzhu who knew who he was, and who asked him to call him Shufu would have saved his family.

“It’ll be easier to show you,” Wei qianbei says. “The modified empathy we developed should be enough.”

“I’ll stay and monitor,” Zhou daifu says. “Someone has to bring you all out. Zhang Xiu can tell me later.”

The modified empathy needs talismans that connect all of them to Wei qianbei, and it takes a shichen to get everything ready. It is already past their bedtime, but he thinks none of them are sleeping tonight anyway.

“Ready?” Wei qianbei asks. “I have his memories... the other me, that is, so that will be what you’ll be seeing, and there may be a lot. Even I haven’t gone through all of them yet.”

“Just take us there,” Jin Ling says, his hand gripping Wei qianbei’s and the other one tight on Sizhui’s. Hanguang Jun holds Wei qianbei’s other hand, and Zewu Jun is on his side. Jingyi is holding Zewu Jun’s hand, and Zhang Xiu is on his other side. Zizhen is between Zhang Xiu and Sizhui.

“Here goes,” Wei qianbei says, and they all fall.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Jiang Cheng is restless, and upset.

Twenty Five

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng is restless and stressed, and his friends and family stage an intervention

Chapter Notes

So, I woke up too early, and am having a headache, and sleep was basically shit, so you all get another update.

Also, some of this is very hand wavy, so don't look at it too closely. I've no idea how time travel works

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

There is an ache in Jiang Cheng, an ache that worsens when he holds his young nephew. Jin Ling is two, and as much as he is alike to look at, he is not the boy Jiang Cheng raised once. He calls him Jiujiu and Wei Wuxian Dajiu, but Jiang Cheng remembers every treble of his nephew's voice, every change in cadence, every cry, and this Jin Ling speaks a different language, is a different person.

It isn't that Jiang Cheng doesn't love this boy; he does so much that it hurts, but his heart *aches* for the boy he raised.

He wants to go back, but he doesn't know how. The other him tries to comfort him, but they both know it is pointless. He doesn't know how he got here. Was it because he wished so ardently to change things? But then why isn't his desperate wish to go back not work?

Maybe it wasn't even you, the other him says to him, two days into the Discussion Conference at Koi Tower. It is evening, and everyone is at the banquet, but Jiang Cheng has slipped away, the itch under his skin too persistent. People have started noticing, no matter how hard he tries to conceal it. Wei Wuxian keeps asking if he is all right, and he shakes his head, but cannot explain why. His sister looks concerned, and so does Jin Zixuan. Even Nie Mingjue and Zewu Jun have cast worried glances his way. Jin Ziyao is the only other person to ask, hesitant, but all Jiang Cheng can do is mutter some inanity.

What can he possibly tell them anyway?

He sits underneath the tree where he and his brother had talked one night, and talks to himself because there is no one else who he can talk to here.

What do you mean? he asks.

You know what we were like when you first came, the other him says. We were in pain and we wanted something to make it go away, to make everything better. Wei Wuxian talked of Baoshen Sanren but we still hoped for something more.

Jiang Cheng knows what he means, remembers himself in those days. The hope that Wei Wuxian had kindled in his chest with talk of Baoshen Sanren's ability, the fear that even in this he may be found wanting, the desperate wish that Wei Wuxian would stay with him because it was only the three of them now, and he knew his sister would have to leave someday. Thirst for revenge, desire to revive their sect and a hope that he will not lose his siblings.

A desperate wish of the other him on this side.

A desperate wish he himself made on the other.

It was both of us, he says.

I don't know how to send you back, the other him says, honest, aching. *I would if I can... I can feel how much you love and miss our nephew.*

Jiang Cheng wants to weep. The Jin Ling of this world has everyone, and even if Jiang Cheng leaves, there is the other him who loves him just as fervently, who rejoices in every call of Jiujiu, who melts every time they hold him.

But *his* Jin Ling, the boy he raised, the man who stands taller than him now, who has already lost so much in his young life, he has very few people, and Jiang Cheng has always been and always will be one of the most important.

After all, isn't that why he tried to save Jin Ziyao instead of just killing him?

He can never completely hate someone who has cared for Jin Ling as Jin Guangyao once did.

The man held a guqin string to Jin Ling's throat, but Wen Ning put a hand through Jin Zixuan's heart, and Jin Ling stabbed Wei Wuxian, and Jiang Cheng led a siege to kill his brother. He knows that not everything is black and white, that even love is not simple or straightforward.

Jin Ziyao wears Nie braids in his hair like a challenge, and looks at Nie Mingjue with his heart in his eyes, and Jin Guangyao had killed Nie Mingjue and dismembered him, body and soul.

Nothing is simple or straightforward.

Jiang Cheng is rather glad that Wei Wuxian never got around to finishing the talisman that Jin Zixuan had asked for. A letter had come to them, and Mo Xuanyu now lives in Koi Tower, and Qin Su's father has withdrawn the suit after Jin Ziyao had told her plainly that he can never love her, as if the Nie braids weren't enough of a statement already.

The first time Jiang Cheng had seen Mo Xuanyu, he had stared and nearly broke down, although Mo Xuanyu is still a boy and so different from what he is in their time. He moves differently, talks differently, his gestures, his mannerisms, his smiles are all entirely different.

Jiang Cheng doesn't know how anyone who has ever *known* Mo Xuanyu would have mistaken Wei Wuxian for him, and his heart aches for the young man who sacrificed himself because he could see no way out. Jiang Cheng will forever be grateful to him for bringing Wei Wuxian back, just as he will be grateful to Nie Huaisang, but that doesn't mean he doesn't feel sad about what Mo Xuanyu had suffered once.

They will worry, the other him says. *We should go back.*

We should, Jiang Cheng agrees and allows the other him to pull him to his feet. The other him has been making most of the decisions these days, choosing what to do, what to say. Jiang Cheng is content to let him as long as he doesn't say anything about the time that Jiang Cheng came from.

What can I even say? The other him asks, amused. *It's not like anyone will believe me anyway.*

Wei Wuxian might.

He might. There is a softness to the words. *But do we want to put that on him?*

Jiang Cheng thinks not. Not if he can help it. He can do nothing about what his brother suffered in his other life, but in this one, he can do his best to keep him safe, and to ensure his happiness.

Lan Wangji isn't that bad, the other him says even though he has seen all of Jiang Cheng's memories and knows how the Second Jade of Lan has been in that other life.

Not to you, Jiang Cheng grumbles, feeling inexplicably betrayed.

The other him laughs, as they step back into the banquet halls and finds a quiet corner for themselves. Wei Wuxian is sitting near his fiancé who looks as stoic as ever, but Jiang Cheng can see that he is happy. They both are.

Lan Xichen folds himself next to him. "Jiang Wanyin," he says with a kind smile. "Are you all right?"

Jiang Cheng has yet to get used to this. Kindness from Lan Xichen who seems to think that since Wei Wuxian is marrying his brother, that makes Jiang Cheng part of his family too. Even Nie Mingjue is kind to him, and Jiang Cheng can find no real reason for it.

The other him answers, "I'm all right, Zewu Jun. Thank you for asking. Some days, memories of the war surfaces is all."

Zewu Jun hums, a thoughtful expression on his face. "It does for us all," he acknowledges, and dips his head and shoulders in a small bow before rising to his feet and leaving.

You've given me more family than I know what to do with, the other him says, sounding both exasperated and awed.

Hold on to them, he responds.

I intend to.

The banquet drags on interminably, but it ends half a shichen before the Lans' bedtime. Wei Wuxian comes to him, and drapes an arm around his shoulder.

"Shijie has asked us to meet her in her sitting room," he says.

Jiang Cheng nods, and thinks nothing of it till they are inside the sitting room, and there are more people in there than he expected.

There is a large round table in the centre of the room which he is pretty sure has never been there. Wei Wuxian tugs him down to sit between him and A-Jie who is holding a sleeping A-Ling. Jin Zixuan is sitting next to her, and Jin Ziyao on his other side. Nie Mingjue is there and Nie Huaisang too. Wen Qing, and Wen Ning sit near them, and Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji complete the circle.

"What's happening?" Jiang Cheng asks, voice deliberately light, but heart hammering.

"We wanted to talk to you," A-Jie says. "We were worried about you."

He sighs. "All of you?" he asks, frowning.

"All of us," Wei Wuxian says firmly.

"I don't know what you expect me to say," Jiang Cheng says. "I'm perfectly all right."

"The truth," Wei Wuxian says. "No matter how weird it is."

Jiang Cheng's heart misses a beat, but he frowns as he looks at his brother. "Weird how?"

"Ah," Wei Wuxian mutters, ducking his head. "All right, I'll start." He looks up, determination on his face. "A-Jie and Lan Zhan already knows this, and I wanted to tell you, but you... you didn't seem fine, and I didn't want to..." He waves his hand, but Jiang Cheng understands.

"All right," he says. "I will accept that, but what is it?"

"It may sound crazy, but... I think that maybe I was possessed briefly? I don't know, but... you remember when we were repairing the dock the day Wen Qing's reply came?"

Jiang Cheng nods. "When you smashed your thumb," he says.

"That wasn't *me*," Wei Wuxian says, looking troubled. "I mean... it felt like I was a spectator and someone else was in control of my body, except I could feel everything they did, and of course it hurt like a bitch when they smashed my thumb."

Jiang Cheng can't breathe, but he can't look away from Wei Wuxian either or interrupt him. The other him steps back in their shared mind, murmuring, *You should take charge here.*

"Anyway, they... they looked at you, and," Wei Wuxian rubs his chest. "There was so much pain, and grief and love, and surprise, I think? It was a whole jumble, but there was a whole lot of emotions, and," he frowns. "I remember them thinking that they have never seen you look so happy, and after that they disappeared, I think. So... if you had any similar experiences... we won't judge, and we won't call you crazy either."

Jiang Cheng can't control the words that spill from his mouth, any more than he can recognise his own voice. "He was here."

The room stills, every eye is on him, but Jiang Cheng holds Wei Wuxian's shocked gaze.

"Jiang Cheng?" Wei Wuxian asks, voice low. "You know them? Him? You... how do you know?"

"How long was he here for?" Jiang Cheng asks, numb somehow.

"A few days? But... he didn't control me after that. I mean, he smashed my thumb and I got all these feelings, but after that, he was there, like a presence in my mind, but that is all. After about a week, I couldn't feel him anymore."

"A week." Familiar bitterness fills him, twists his face into a scowl that none in this time has seen, but is familiar to everyone in his other life. Anger blazes, so familiar, something that has never happened to him here once the war got over. "*A week* and he *left* without letting me know it was *him*, that he was *here*." Jiang Cheng rubs his face, his anger being replaced by weariness, and all he feels is exhausted now. *His* Wei Wuxian, the one from his time was *here* and had *left* without a word to Jiang Cheng indicating his presence. He is *so tired* of his brother and of being the only one to try and make an effort. "What was I even expecting?"

He came here for you, the other him points out. *He probably didn't want to affect your happiness.*

Jiang Cheng wants to believe that so desperately, but he has learnt through bitter experience not to take his brother's love for granted, or to take anything the other Wei Wuxian does at face value.

"A-Cheng," A-Jie, catches his shoulder and turns him to face her. Jin Ling is now in his father's arms, still asleep. "A-Cheng, can you tell us what you know of him? What does he want with you or A-Xian?"

Tell them, the other him says. *They deserve to know.*

They won't believe me.

You won't know till you tell them.

He nods once, and exhales loudly. "Is there any wine?" he asks. "Because I'm not having this conversation sober."

He's not sure he can do it drunk either, but it beats the alternative.

It is Jin Ziyao who rises to bring wine. Jiang Cheng ignores the cup and drinks straight from the jar. It does nothing.

"It takes a lot for him to be drunk," Wei Wuxian mutters. "A lot more than it takes even me." He sounds fond, and even now, with all his old anger at the old Wei Wuxian back, Jiang Cheng can't be angry at this one.

Just like he can't stop loving the other one, even after all the betrayal, all the grief.

"A-Cheng," A-Jie says as he finishes the second jar.

He looks at her then, this sister of his, whom he had missed more than he can say, whose presence he is grateful for every single day. He had been angry with her for leaving him, had cried in the ancestral hall of the Jins, begged her forgiveness not just for not being able to protect her, but for being unable to protect the brother she gave her life to protect.

Jin Guangyao had never acted like he knew about his breakdowns, had always allowed him unhindered access to the Jins' ancestral hall.

Jiang Cheng had never been able to hate that man as fully as he had wanted to, and he understands why not even Huaisang could, despite everything. It had been confessed to him in a drunken state once when Huaisang had wept for his San-Ge as much as his Da-Ge.

There is a dusty hat sitting among Huaisang's fans, a tablet with a Jin name in a corner of the Unclean Realm, a dog that his nephew once used to play with, matching scars around both Wei Wuxian's and Jin Ling's necks.

Jin Ling could have got rid of that scar years ago, but Jiang Cheng knows why he hasn't, and he will never tell him to, either.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Ouyang Zizhen is fascinated.

Twenty Six

Chapter Summary

Ouyang Zizhen is fascinated and a bit impressed, Jin Ling explains a few things, and everyone has a lot to process

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Of every weird thing that Zizhen has ever encountered in his life, he thinks that this has to be the weirdest. Even after they are back, none of them seem able to speak. Sizhui is shaking so much, and Jin Ling is no better. Zizhen and Jingyi are holding them, and right now none of them cares about who else is in the room. Zizhen has a feeling that Jiang Zongzhu's two most trusted people already know anyway. If the size of the beds in the rooms they have been given are any indication, Jiang Zongzhu already knows and doesn't care.

The rest of the people are Sizhui's and Jin Ling's family and Zizhen thinks that they won't care much either.

He thinks of what they had seen, and Wei qianbei is right. Jiang Zongzhu doesn't seem to have done anything except stop Wei qianbei from giving him his golden core, and cheat using his knowledge of events to win the Sunshot campaign without demonic cultivation. There is no indication that the things that happened afterwards, the Wens, and everything, is anything except Wei qianbei's idea. Jiang Zongzhu has only *supported* him.

Oh.

"He cheated," Zizhen says. "He cheated so much!"

"What?" Wei qianbei asks.

"He never says anything, never initiates anything, but whenever you bring things up, he uses his knowledge," Zizhen explains.

He can see it dawn on all their faces, and Zhang Xiu gives a laugh that is proud but also broken. "He is a brilliant man," he says.

"I've never seen him be so happy before," Jin Ling says, quiet but devastated.

"I don't think I've ever seen him *smile* like that," Jingyi agrees, even as he pulls Jin Ling closer.

“My family is alive,” Sizhui whispers and Zizhen tugs him closer and holds him tighter. “My parents are alive! I have a younger brother!”

“My parents are alive too,” Jin Ling swipes a hand across his eyes. “And... and... you never died,” he says looking at Wei qianbei. “And everyone is alive, and they are all happy, so Jiujiu is happy too... he has everything he wants, even me.”

“Not you,” Wei Wuxian says. “That maybe a Jin Ling, but he’s not you. He doesn’t even have the same name.” There is some petulance in his voice at that last.

Jin Ling snorts. “No, he has a better name because someone had better sense than to let *you* name me,” he snipes. “Xiao-Shushu is much better at names.”

Wei qianbei pouts. “I’ll have you know that Rulan is an excellent name.”

“A-Yao,” Zewu Jun says, his voice heavy. “How?”

“I can’t believe Jiang Cheng had *nothing* to do with that,” Wei qianbei says. “I mean he did leave very mysteriously after he heard about Meng Yao and then the two of them reached Langya together, and nothing happened like it did the last time, so he did *something*, but I don’t know what.”

“Or why,” Jingyi says. “Why would he try and help him?”

Jin Ling snorts. “You won’t understand it,” he says. “Because you don’t know Jiujiu.”

“That is true,” Sizhui says. “Shufu is... none of us really know him, not like you do, so can you explain it to us?”

Jin Ling nods. “Xiao-Shushu was good to me,” he says. “He was very kind. He gave me Fairy after... after Jin Chan and his friends bullied me once and I was throwing a tantrum, and wouldn’t open the door to anyone... He never stopped Jiujiu from visiting me at Koi Tower, and if I wanted to stay a few extra weeks in Lotus Pier, he always allowed it, even when the elders gave him grief.” He pauses, a frown on his face. “Jiujiu... he used to visit Koi Tower to... to go to the ancestral hall, to see A-Niang... He used to stay there and leave without meeting anyone, and xiao-Shushu made sure that he was never disturbed, that no one approached the ancestral hall when he was there. The elders didn’t like it that an outsider was allowed to visit whenever he wanted, but xiao-Shushu never gave in to them.” Jin Ling grimaces. “The elders still don’t like it when Jiujiu visits the ancestral hall, but they know better than to raise it with *me*, and anyway, they’re all used to it by now.” He shakes his head. “In any case, the point is he didn’t hate xiao-Shushu, not that badly, and *of course* he was going to help him if he got a chance.”

“But he tried to hurt *you*,” Wei qianbei says, looking baffled. “Jin Ling, you still have a scar on your neck!”

“Dajiu,” Jin Ling says. “I *stabbed* you. Jiujiu led a siege to *kill* you. You, of all people should know that nothing is as cut and dry as all that.” He touches his neck. “Why do you think I still keep this when I could have got rid of it years ago?”

Jingyi's arms visibly tighten around Jin Ling whose voice breaks at the end. Sizhui and Zizhen lean towards him, and he smiles at them though his eyes are misty.

"Is it possible to bring him back?" Zhang Xiu asks. "Zongzhu," he clarifies.

"Should we?" Jin Ling asks before Wei qianbei can explain. "He's happy there, we've all seen it. Why would we bring him back here?"

"That should be his decision," Wei qianbei says. "I of all people know what happens when decisions are taken for him without his permission. Do you want to do that to him again?"

Jin Ling deflates. "No," he says. "But... I don't want him to feel like he has to come back, you know. So... if you're going there again, tell him that he can stay if he wants to."

Wei qianbei nods. "I may not be the best person to tell him, but I'll try, Jin Ling."

"So, can we bring him back?" Zhang Xiu asks again.

"Not from here, we can't," Wei qianbei says. "I am using the connection between my soul and his golden core and his soul to reach him. But he doesn't have a golden core in that time, so he cannot be brought back the same way."

"But the Wei qianbei *there* can bring him back," Zizhen says, understanding what Wei qianbei was saying. "Because his golden core is in Jiang Zongzhu here, and that gives him a stronger connection."

"Correct," Wei qianbei says. "So, I will have to take another trip to talk to my alternate self and to Jiang Cheng, and find a way to bring him back."

"Well, none of you are doing that any time soon," Zhou daifu says. "You all need more time to recover before you can pour that much spiritual energy into that array again."

"More than usual, if we're going to bring Jiang Cheng with us," Wei qianbei says.

"Wei Ying must go when able," Hanguang Jun says quietly, and Zizhen almost wants to ask who are you and what did you do with Hanguang Jun. "You must bring your brother home."

They have barely a moment to avert their eyes before Wei qianbei literally throws himself on Hanguang Jun and kisses him with *tongue*.

"Get a room!" Jin Ling shouts, screwing his eyes shut.

"Good idea," Wei qianbei says as he pulls Hanguang Jun and the two of them leave.

"I'm scarred for life!" Jin Ling declares, opening his eyes.

"Well," Jingyi says with a look on his face that spells trouble.

"Jingyi," Zewu Jun sounds amused, but Jingyi blushes and falls silent.

“I think I will stay here,” Zewu Jun says.

“They often forget the existence of silencing talismans,” Jingyi says.

“Ugh, that’s my *uncle*, you moron, why do you have to *say* it?” Jin Ling groans.

“Well,” Sizhui starts, but Zizhen claps a hand over his mouth.

“I can teach you the silencing spell, Jin Zongzhu, Ouyang Zongzhu,” Zewu Jun says, still amused. “You don’t have to physically silence them.”

Zizhen thinks that the man looks a lot better today than he has since he came out of seclusion, though it has been years. He doesn’t know what changed, but it’s good, he thinks. It’s good because Sizhui cares very deeply for this uncle of his as well, and he will be glad to see him happy.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Jiang Cheng gets drunk, and tells his family and friends the truth,

Twenty Seven

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng gets drunk and talks about his own past

Chapter Notes

This is a chapter I had doubts about because Jiang Cheng has tried so hard not to let anyone know of his past, but in his defence, he is drunk, and this is the first time in his life that he has been able to tell anyone all these things.

Also, we're almost at the end of this story, which whoo.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“This is going to sound crazy,” Jiang Cheng says. “And I don’t expect any of you to believe me. I have no proof to offer. You will have to take my word on faith here.” He breaks the seal of another jar and knocks it back without waiting for their response. “And I would really appreciate it if you don’t interrupt me till I am finished.”

They all nod, faces full of apprehension.

“I am from the future,” he says. “But not from your future, I think. I don’t know why that is.”

“Did you change anything when you got here?” Wei Wuxian asks.

“Yes,” Jiang Cheng says.

“What?” Nie Mingjue asks, but Wei Wuxian shakes his head, as if that is not important.

“If you changed things, that will explain why the future changed for us, but your past remains the same,” he says. “Changing things cannot change what already happened to you; it can only create another timeline.” He frowned. “So, now we’re in another timeline, and the person who was here... he is from your timeline?”

Jiang Cheng nods. “He is you from our timeline.” This time he pours wine into a cup before knocking it back. “No more interruptions, Wei Wuxian.”

He doesn’t think he will be able to do it with interruptions.

“All right,” Wei Wuxian nods though he looks afraid as well as excited. “I just wanted to clarify about the time thing.”

Jiang Cheng knocks back another cup of wine. “Back where I come from,” he says. “You... *He* gave me his golden core, and I never told him how I lost it.” He pauses. “He left after the surgery, presumably so I won’t find out the truth. He swore Wen Qing and Wen Ning to secrecy.” He pauses again, fills another cup, drinks and says with deliberate slowness. “Wen Chao caught him and threw him into the Burial Mounds.” He drinks again. “I waited for him a week, and then went to the Unclean Realm. We retrieved our swords before we went to war, and... Lan Wangji and I searched for him.” He meets Lan Wangji’s eyes and reads the shock in them. “Don’t look so shocked. Your alternate self was tolerable in those days. Anyway, we searched, interrogated every Wen soldier we could find about his whereabouts before we killed them, and three months into the campaign, we came across something.” Jiang Cheng hasn’t told anyone that he still has nightmares from the Yiling Supervisory office. That makes it easier to describe the horror and then the shock and relief when his brother finally returned.

He talks about the war, about demonic cultivation and the Stygian Tiger seal, and of how an army of five thousand was defeated singlehandedly by Wei Wuxian using the seal. He tells them about how Meng Yao had become a spy in Nightless City, passing on information to Lan Xichen till Nie Mingjue got captured and then Meng Yao stabbed Wen Ruohan in the back to kill him.

“After that, his father acknowledged him,” he says, lips twisting.

“He did?” Jin Ziyao asks.

“Jin Guangyao was his new name,” Jiang Cheng says and feels guilty at the full body flinch. Everyone present here knows what it means, and Jiang Cheng notices the way Jin Zixuan reaches out a hand to comfort his brother.

“Anyway, afterwards, we went back to Lotus Pier, and... Wei Wuxian... he spent most of his days at the bottom of a wine jar, avoiding me. He talked to A-Jie at times, but he kept pulling away from me.” He shakes his head. “To be honest, it was a relief once I found out about the core, because to have him hate me for no reason hurt like hell.”

He takes another drink and tells them about the Phoenix Mountain Hunt, and about the banquet afterwards, about Jin Zixun, and the labour camps, about Wei Wuxian rescuing the Wen remnants and taking them to burial mounds, about the staged fight and defection from YunmengJiang.

He tells them about taking A-Jie to see Wei Wuxian in her wedding finery, about how she brought him soup and gave a bowl to Wen Ning though he was a fierce corpse. About how they wanted him to choose a courtesy name for the child A-Jie might have some day.

In this life, it is Jin Ziyao who chooses Jin Ling’s courtesy name, Jin Rukai. It is one more difference between his nephew in his other life and this one.

“What did I name him?” Wei Wuxian asks, almost bouncing in excitement, because of course he can’t keep quiet.

“Not *you*,” Jiang Cheng mutters. “*He* named him Jin Rulan.”

It is Jin Zixuan who sniggers first, and everyone else starts laughing, except Wei Wuxian who is pouting, and Lan Wangji whose ears are red.

“Good to know some things don’t change,” Lan Xichen says with an indulgent smile.

“A sentient fierce corpse?” Nie Mingjue asks before Jiang Cheng can start again. “He turned Wen Ning into a sentient fierce corpse?”

“There weren’t many choices,” Jiang Cheng mutters, feeling curiously defensive. “He’s... he’s almost the same.” He scowls. “Awkward and stuttering.”

“You hate me,” Wen Ning says, and he looks almost devastated.

“*Him*, not *you*,” Jiang Cheng rubs his face. “Fuck, this is so confusing, with two of all of you, and it’s not hatred... I just... don’t like him very much, no matter how grateful I am to him.”

“Maybe you should continue,” Lan Xichen says.

So, Jiang Cheng does, tells them about a year where he claimed Yiling for Yunmeng in an attempt to keep the other Sects from Wei Wuxian, and how he had to fight tooth and nail to keep its status thus, about the secret visits him and his sister paid him. He tells them about Jin Ling’s one month celebration, and of the ambush in Qiongqi Dao, and of how Jin Guangyao had set it up on his father’s instructions because Jin Guangshan wanted the Stygian Tiger Seal. He tells of how Jin Guangyao sent Jin Zixuan there to deescalate the situation.

“And then Wen Ning put his hand through Jin Zixuan’s chest, killed Jin Zixun and carried Wei Wuxian back to the burial mounds.” Jiang Cheng shakes his head. “It wasn’t Wen Ning’s fault, not really. Wei Wuxian lost control, but Jin Guangshan wanted retribution, and I had to stay with A-Jie and A-Ling. They made an offer that if the Ghost General and the leader of the Wens surrendered, they would call it even and let it go. Wen Qing incapacitated Wei Wuxian with needles and she and Wen Ning surrendered. Later, the Jins told us they had both been killed and showed us their ashes.”

Jiang Cheng gripped his wine cup. “After three days, Wei Wuxian sneaked into Koi Tower to see A-Jie. Madam Jin saw him and raised the alarm, and he ran away, but not before hearing that there was a pledge conference in Nightless City. Around three thousand cultivators, led by the Jin, demanding that the Burial Mounds be sieged.” He closes his eyes. “Wei Wuxian came there, challenged everyone, raised corpses... Lan Wangji tried to stop him, but... he was...he was lost to the resentment. And then... A-Jie was there, calling for him... one of his corpses injured her, and neither of us could stop it.” The cup shattered, but he hardly felt the pain. “I held her, and she talked to him, and... a man with a sword attacked him from behind, and she... she pushed him away, and was stabbed in the neck.” He looks at the blood in his hands and feels nothing. “She died in my arms, and Wei Wuxian lost control again. He put the seal together, and...it was a massacre.”

“A-Cheng, your hand,” His sister took his hand, and he can feel her spiritual energy flowing through his hand.

“I only know the next part second-hand,” he says. “Maybe even third-hand.” It was Jin Ling who had told him. “It seems that after the battle, everyone was heavily injured including Wei Wuxian. If anyone had seen him there, he would have been killed, but Lan Wangji who was also injured got to him first, and took him to Yiling and hid him in a cave. Zewu Jun was worried that his brother may be considered an accomplice of the Yiling Laozu, and he and Lan Qiren took thirty-three elders who Hanguang Jun respected and who cared for him, and searched for them both. When they found them, Lan Wangji refused to leave Wei Wuxian, there was a fight, and he injured all thirty-three elders.” Jiang Cheng rubs his face again. “In the end, they dragged him back to Gusu, gave him thirty-three strikes with the discipline whip in one go.”

“Thirty-three?” Lan Xichen sounds broken.

“I’ve seen the scars, Zewu Jun,” Jiang Cheng says. “It happened.”

It was a night hunt where Lan Wangji got injured protecting Sizhui and Wei Wuxian got injured protecting Jin Ling, and Jiang Cheng had brought them all back to Lotus Pier because it was the closest. That was when Jiang Cheng had seen the scars on Lan Wangji’s back, and Jin Ling had told him about how he got them. That had been six years ago.

It was the only time Wei Wuxian had been in Lotus Pier since the night Jiang Cheng had literally thrown him out.

Jiang Cheng doesn’t count that as Wei Wuxian coming to Lotus Pier.

“Anyway,” Jiang Cheng sighs. “Three months after the massacre at Nightless city, the entire cultivation world decided to siege Burial Mounds.” He pauses, meets Wei Wuxian’s eyes and says, “I led them.” He shakes his head and snatches another jar from the table. Finishes it. He cannot say that he didn’t have a choice, that his insistence on keeping Yiling a part of Yunmeng forced his hand there. He doesn’t say it anyway. They don’t have to know everything. “Wei Wuxian destroyed the seal and was torn apart by his own fierce corpses. I went to Koi Tower, to the nursery, picked up A-Ling, and returned to Lotus Pier.”

“Oh, A-Cheng,” A-Jie whispers. “A-Cheng,”

“I’m fine,” he mutters. “It was a long time ago.”

“Father let you have him?” Jin Zixuan asks.

“He sent a few messages, and I whipped the messengers with Zidian.” Jiang Cheng says. “I made it very clear that anyone who steps into Lotus Pier to take my nephew from me would meet either Sandu or Zidian. I may not have been fully stable then.” He pauses again. “I went back to the Burial Mounds and found his flute, but nothing else. Lan Wangji found the kid.”

“He went there?” Lan Xichen asks.

“Again, I have only second or third hand knowledge of this,” Jiang Cheng says. “Lan Wangji went there when he heard of Wei Wuxian’s death, found the kid hidden in a tree, took him

back with him, bought a jar of Emperor's smile, drank it, broke into the Gusu Lan's treasure rooms and branded himself over the chest with a Wen brand."

Wei Wuxian's hand steals to his chest where his robes conceal the brand that he had got so many years ago.

"Yeah," Jiang Cheng says with wry humour. "Exactly there. Anyway, once I settled down, I went back to Koi Tower, met with Madam Jin and negotiated custody of A-Ling. I was allowed to keep him at Lotus Pier till he was six, and afterwards he was to spend half the year at Koi Tower and the other half in Lotus Pier."

The other him is silent, already knowing it all, and not wanting to push him. Jiang Cheng tells them about Nie Mingjue's qi deviation, about Jin Guangshan's death, though not the details, just that he died; about the watch towers that exist in this timeline as well because no matter what form he takes, that man is the same in many respects.

And then he tells them about Mo Xuanyu and about Wei Wuxian's resurrection.

He gives them very little detail; it is still too raw, too painful, but gives them the gist of what happened, of how Jin Guangyao had caused Nie Mingjue's death and how Huaisang had engineered his downfall in return, manipulating Mo Xuanyu to bring back Wei Wuxian. He tells them briefly about the second siege, about Su She, about Wen Ning telling him about the golden core, about what went down in the Guanyin temple.

He doesn't talk about Qin Su or what happened with her. That, he thinks, is too cruel. Madam Qin doesn't deserve to have her deepest secret paraded before complete strangers.

He keeps Sisi's confession out as well, because there is no reason to cause too much pain to either Jin Ziyao or Jin Zixuan.

"That was eight years ago," he says, and grimaces. "Eight years when I came here, I think. Must be longer now."

"And?" Wei Wuxian asks.

"And what?" Jiang Cheng asks. "Jin Ling became the new Sect Leader of the Jins, I went back to Lotus Pier, you and Lan Wangji eloped and got married, Zewu Jun went into seclusion for a year, and Nie Huaisang became the Chief Cultivator."

"You and I," Wei Wuxian says gesturing between them. "What happened with us?"

"He told me that he gave me his golden core to pay his debt to the Jiang Sect, that it all happened in another life for him, that I should put it in the past." Jiang Cheng shrugs. "You can't blame him. I didn't treat him that well either. He'd been dead, and when he came back, I drove him out of Lotus Pier, so it's not like it's his completely fault." He takes another drink. "We're civil to each other when we meet, though the same can't be said for his husband and I. We're decidedly uncivil to each other." He nods at Lan Wangji. "You're much better than him. He's an absolute asshole, but my idiot brother loves him, so I have to tolerate him, even if I don't have to be polite about it."

“Jiang gonzi,” Jin Ziyao says, his voice low, eyes wide and haunted. “You said... all the things I did... why did you help me here? You could have just killed me.”

“Not you,” Jiang Cheng says automatically. “Him.” He grimaces again, “All right. I won’t lie. I considered killing you, but the thing is I didn’t hate you. You weren’t him. Helping you wasn’t something I thought of doing. It just happened.”

“But the other me?” Jin Ziyao persisted.

“To be honest, I didn’t hate him as much as I should have either,” Jiang Cheng admits.

“How can you not hate him?” Nie Mingjue demanded.

“Nie Zongzhu,” Jiang Cheng says. “He and I were not friends by any definition of the word, but we raised a nephew together. When A-Ling was bullied by the other kids, he got him a puppy and helped him to train it. He gave him his father’s sword. He never tried to keep him from me.” He rubs his face again. “Whenever I wanted to visit my sister, he allowed it without questions or demands, so, no, I didn’t hate him.” He grimaces. “Not as much as I should, anyway.”

“You and I still don’t talk?” Wei Wuxian asks, looking devastated.

“You and I talk all the time, what are you talking about?” Jiang Cheng blinks owlishly at his brother.

“You’re drunk,” Huaisang says calmly.

“Huh,” Jiang Cheng says.

“What about the Jiang Cheng who should be here?” Wei Wuxian asks. “Is he there?”

“He’s here,” Jiang Cheng says. “He’s the reason I told you all this.” He scowls. “He thought you should know.”

“And you want to go back,” A-Jie says, her voice anguished. “To your own time.”

“I don’t know if it’s possible,” Jiang Cheng admits. “I don’t even know *how* I’m here. I don’t know how *he* came here, and if he hadn’t run away without a word, I could have asked, but no.” He clenches his fist.

“Why do you want to go back?” Lan Wangji asks. “You have a better life here.”

“I know,” Jiang Cheng sighs. “But I miss *my* Jin Ling. And if Wei Wuxian was here, it means that Jin Ling went to him. If there’s a way to go back, I have to, for him.” He remembers something and adds. “Besides, I’m pretty sure he’s in a four-way relationship with a minor Sect Leader, the Lan Sect Heir and a Lan Senior Disciple, and none of them are as subtle as they think. I would like to be there in case someone finds out and attempts to make trouble.”

“Four-way?” A-Jie asks.

Jiang Cheng shrugs in reply.

“Are they happy?” she asks.

“Very,” he says. That is something he knows for certain.

Wei Wuxian nods and looks at him, and there’s something devastated and also determined in his expression. “Then we’ll have to find a way to send you back,” he says. “The other me... he saw my memories when he was here because I was too surprised and couldn’t guard myself in time, but I felt what he did... I think he’ll be back, and I’ll find out how to send you back.”

“You’ve been dealing with the other me for longer than you know,” Jiang Cheng says quietly. “I mean I’ve been sort of here, but it’s been mostly him... you won’t miss me when I’m gone.”

He will miss them all, but he knows that they’re happy and safe and well. That’s enough.

“I think I *will*,” Wei Wuxian mutters, and Jiang Cheng has to look away, because he no longer feels drunk and it hurts so much to have been the cause of that expression on his brother’s face.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Wei Wuxian detects an intruder in his mind again, and is angry.

Twenty Eight

Chapter Summary

Wei Wuxian has a conversation with himself, and then with Jiang Cheng. Some decisions are made.

Chapter Notes

We're almost at the end! Whoo!! Thank you everyone who has supported this. I have so many feelings for this, and I can't believe that so many people like this. Thank you so so much

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wei Wuxian is taking down his hair when he feels the alien presence in his mind, and this time he is careful not to allow him to sift through his mind and memories. The last time the other had succeeded in doing it, and Wei Wuxian still doesn't know what impact that has, but this time, he is careful to guard himself.

I see you're back, he says, hostile. *You've some nerve, coming back to see him after everything you did.*

He told you. There is resignation in his voice.

I am not the only one who knows. It is a threat. If this man somehow brings anyone else, they're all ready.

Can I talk to him? He asks, cautious.

And why should I let you do that? He snarls in his head. It is not strange, this anger. He loves his brother, and wants to protect him from anyone who may seek to hurt him.

Even if it is himself.

Especially if it is himself.

Because Wei Wuxian knows by now that *no one* possesses as much power as he does to hurt Jiang Cheng.

And the other him had been so oblivious to it and had hurt him so badly.

Which is still weird. He can't see himself doing anything to hurt Jiang Cheng ever, but still this other him had done it.

He knows that Jiang Cheng thinks that he has hurt the other him, had failed him, but—

If the other him hadn't *lied*—

You have felt what I feel, the other him says. *You know I love him.*

Love is not enough, he says, furious. *Your love has never been enough.*

He expects arguments, justifications.

He does not expect agreement.

I know.

He said that your husband and him are barely polite to each other, he probes. *That you and he are only civil to each other. Why do you not seek to change that?*

If Lan Zhan and Jiang Cheng doesn't like each other, Wei Wuxian thinks that he will do everything he can to make them understand the other, and to make them get along.

I will. It was wrong of me to have let things be the way they are.

It's been eight years since you came back.

It's an accusation and they both know it. Eight years this man has waited, left his brother alone, made him feel unloved. *We're civil to each other when we meet*, Jiang Cheng had said. It makes Wei Wuxian sick to his core to think of behaving that way to his little brother.

We hurt each other, the other him says, soft, and tired.

And how did he hurt you? Wei Wuxian snaps. *Did you really expect him to leave his Sect, the people who followed him into war when he was a boy, who followed him though he had nothing to offer them but a promise of protection, behind so you could play hero to a handful of fugitives? When you didn't even go to him, didn't even consult him even though you promised to stand by him? Even though he was your Sect Leader?*

He couldn't have helped.

Did you ask? If you had asked, he would have found a way, for you. Of course he couldn't help once you made a mess and turned the Jin against you. But you could have asked before, and he would have helped.

Even if you hate me, even if you're right, there's nothing I can about what already happened. I am here to talk to my brother. Will you take me to him?

You'll have to wait, he says, just to be petty. *And don't think you can take control of my body.* He settles himself into bed. *How are you here anyway?*

An array, the other him says. I used the connection I have to the core in him, and the connection he has to that core.

That connection would have died once you got here, he observes, though he can't hide his fascination.

It did, which is why I need your help if he wants to come back.

You want me to use the connection between my core and the one in him in that other time, to send him into his body.

That is the idea.

The door slides open, and Jiang Cheng steps inside. "You went to bed early?" he asks, as he yawns and sits down on the bed, facing him.

"I had an unexpected visitor," he says. "He wants to talk to you."

Jiang Cheng stiffens and Wei Wuxian sits up. "I'll be here," he says, a warning for the other him as well.

I am not going to hurt him.

I am not going to let you.

He will wrest control if the other him says *one wrong word*.

Wei Wuxian still can't say when the Jiang Cheng of this world goes and the other one takes over, but now, in this moment, he can see it. There is so much pain in Jiang Cheng's eyes, grief and loss and *knowledge*, and he doesn't know how he never noticed it before.

"All right," Jiang Cheng says, still tense. "I'll talk to him."

The sensation doesn't get any better this time around either. His eyes look at Jiang Cheng, but the emotions—the longing, the pain, and the love—are so intense.

"Jiang Cheng," he says, his voice quiet.

"Wei Wuxian," the words are spat out like a curse, and Wei Wuxian thinks he would rather die than ever hear his brother talk to him in that tone. He can feel the hurt the other him feels too. "What are you doing here?"

"To ask if you want to come home," Wei Wuxian says. "Jin Ling... he says he wants you to come home, but if you... if this is where you want to stay, then we will all accept that." He licks his lips. "I... modified empathy so it can be used on a living person, and... they saw my memories from..." He clears his throat, and it is so weird to see him do things he is *not* doing. "His memories, I mean... and we all saw that you're happy, and... so if you want to stay, we won't force you, but if you want to come home..."

"What do *you* want?" Jiang Cheng asks.

“What?” Wei Wuxian falters, and Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes.

“It’s a simple question, Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng says. “It doesn’t need much soul searching to answer. Do *you* want me to come home?”

Wei Wuxian licks his lips. “Yes,” he says, barely audible. “But do *you* want to come home?”

Jiang Cheng nods. “I do,” he says. “Can you do it?”

“There’s an array,” he says. “It will need some modification, and a great deal of spiritual power... I’ll teach him how to do it, but it will need more power than what he has.”

“Who’s powering it over there?” Jiang Cheng asks, looking interested.

“Lan Zhan, Zewu Jun, Zhang Xiu, Jin Ling, A-Yuan, Jingyi and Ouyang Zizhen.”

“Hanguang Jun is actually deigning to help me?” Jiang Cheng asks, a sneer in his voice.

“Lan Zhan... he thinks he’s protecting *me*, Jiang Cheng.”

“When have *you* ever bothered to correct that assumption, Wei Wuxian?”

“I haven’t, and I am wrong,” the other him says, “He blames you for my death, for... for...”

“For not standing by you, for your defection from the Sect, for leading a siege meant to kill you,” Jiang Cheng says. “And probably, for having your core inside me too.”

“I will talk to him,” the other him says quietly. “I... I didn’t... back then when I came back... I really thought you hated me then... and I was sure I deserved that... I still do, but...”

“Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Cheng says, sounding tired. “Shut up, will you?”

“Jiang Cheng...”

“It wasn’t your fault. My parents’ death, what happened to A-Jie... *none of it* was your fault. The Wen would have come, no matter what, and A-Jie... she made the choice to give her life for you... and Jin Zixuan...” Jiang Cheng sighs. “Lan Wangji kept saying that resentful energy will affect your mind, and I never listened because you kept insisting you can control it and I wanted to believe that. Even when I saw signs of instability, I ignored it because it was convenient for me to do so... so tell me, Wei Wuxian... am I also not culpable in your loss of control? For every life you took in Qiongqi Dao as well as Nightless City... aren’t I responsible as well?”

There is so much pain and self-recrimination in his voice, and a sob breaks from the other him who shakes his head violently. “No! Even if you... Lan Zhan tried and I never *listened*, Jiang Cheng... you know that, you were there... if you said something, I wouldn’t have listened either...”

Neither of them is saying the most important thing here, Wei Wuxian thinks. In those days, Jiang Cheng had trusted Wei Wuxian, trusted him implicitly, unflinchingly, so if Wei Wuxian

said he could control it, Jiang Cheng would have believed it, no questions asked.

But even now, Jiang Cheng seeks to protect Wei Wuxian, and wouldn't say those words. Maybe someday, the two of them would be at a place when Jiang Cheng will be able to say it without the other him feeling it as an accusation.

They aren't there yet.

It leaves him cold to think that this could have been *them*. This Wei Wuxian and this Jiang Cheng who loves each other so fiercely, but who are still strangers to each other. This could have been them if *this* Jiang Cheng hadn't come along with his knowledge of the future and changed things.

He had almost given up his golden core once, after all.

He feels unwilling sympathy for the other him.

Perhaps he shouldn't judge too harshly, but—

It was their choice, and Jiang Cheng didn't even know, and wouldn't have accepted if he had known.

“So,” he says, pushing the other him aside forcibly. The other he can talk to Jiang Cheng back in his world. *He* wants to talk to his brother now. “Tomorrow, we'll work on the array. I'll send out a few messages, and everyone will be here. They'll also want to say goodbye.”

You better be gone by then, and be waiting when he gets home. And then you better get around to fixing things with him.

The other him agrees.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: The beginning of a reconciliation

Twenty Nine

Chapter Summary

Jiang Cheng is happy

Chapter Notes

The final chapter is here!!! I have too many feelings about this, and I really want to explore more, but this is a good place to end, I think.

Thank you everyone who has accompanied me on this journey.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Jiang Cheng wakes up in his bed, and the first thing he notices is the presence of his golden core. The second thing is the body next to him, head pillowed on his chest. Jin Ling looks absurdly young like this, and he's sound asleep.

"Shufu?" a whispered voice has him looking up to meet Lan Sizhui's eyes. The smile on his face is blinding. "You're back," he says, a choke to his voice.

"Come over here," Jiang Cheng says, for this is also his nephew, one he didn't get to raise, but no less loved. Sizhui climbs on to his other side, careful not to wake or jostle Jin Ling, and arranges himself to curl against Jiang Cheng. Jiang Cheng holds him, and murmurs, "Hope Lan Jingyi and Ouyang Zongzhu won't feel left out."

Sizhui chuckles wetly. "You should call him Zizhen," he says.

"Is that what I should do?" Jiang Cheng asks, brow raised. "Do you think you can tell me what to do? Why should I call him that?"

"You know why," Sizhui says, even as he blushes. "I'm sure you already know, Shufu. Don't make me say it."

"If you don't shut up, I'll break your legs," Jin Ling grouches, his voice still sleep-slurred. "Who are you talking to anyway?"

Jiang Cheng swallows. "A-Ling," he says.

Jin Ling goes still. He lifts his head and half rises to look at Jiang Cheng, lips trembling. "Jiujiu?"

Jiang Cheng's vision blurs. "I'm back, A-Ling," he says.

Jin Ling crushes him in his arms, and Sizhui joins him. Jiang Cheng holds both his nephews and absolutely doesn't cry.

"Wei qianbei says you don't know how you got there," Sizhui says after a while.

Jiang Cheng thinks of the other him. "I don't," he admits.

"I didn't believe him when he said you were coming back," Jin Ling says. "He says the other one... the him in that time, *threatened* him..." He sounds awed. "I don't know why you left them all, and came here when—"

"A-Ling," he interrupts. "I *was* happy there, but it was not *my* life. My life is *here*, and I *want* to be here." He smiles at them both. "Besides, you will need some help if you ever plan on making your relationships public, and I've been told I'm good at scaring people."

Sizhui smiles mistily. "We appreciate the support, Shufu, but we haven't decided when to do it."

"Do it before someone finds out and smears your names all over," Jiang Cheng says. "You should be the ones in control of what story is told out there, and that can happen only if you are the first to tell it."

Jin Ling looks thoughtful. "It's not going to be simple," he says, sitting up. Jiang Cheng sits up as well, and Sizhui is already sitting cross legged on the bed.

"No," Jiang Cheng says. He can imagine the fall out, but— "On the plus side, you will have the support of all four of the Great Sect Leaders, one of whom is the Chief Cultivator."

"Why would Nie-Zongzhu support us?" Sizhui asks, doubtful.

"He will, if your Zewu Jun asks him," Jiang Cheng says.

He knows Huaisang will do almost anything for his Er-Ge's forgiveness. Despite the fact that the two men are mending their brotherhood, Huaisang knows that Zewu Jun hasn't forgiven him yet.

Huaisang will probably support the youngsters just for the heck of it, but having Zewu Jun ask will make him feel good about it rather than just petty satisfaction.

The door slides open to reveal Wei Wuxian and both Jin Ling and Sizhui are on their feet.

"We'll leave you to talk," Jin Ling says as he and Sizhui exit the room.

Wei Wuxian comes inside, closing the door.

"Wei Wuxian," Jiang Cheng says, but it's softer now.

Wei Wuxian comes closer, and sits on the edge of the bed. “Jiang Cheng,” he says, wary and hopeful.

Jiang Cheng is tired, and doesn’t want to fight with Wei Wuxian anymore. But Wei Wuxian’s eyes hold so much hope and Jiang Cheng has missed his brother.

“Wei Wuxian,” he says, tugging him closer and wrapping his arms around him. “You’re an idiot.”

“I know,” Wei Wuxian whispers, hugging him back.

They will need to talk, and they both know that. They will need to address everything that’s in their past before they can move forward. His idiot of a brother must have thought shoving things in the past would help, but it doesn’t. It doesn’t matter that Wei Wuxian loves him or that he loves Wei Wuxian, if all they can do is hurt each other. A proper conversation will help.

But for now, he will settle for hugging his brother.

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap!!

I am rather sad, because I did enjoy all the love and comments, and I'm definitely going to miss all that.

I can't stress just how much I adore everyone who has validated my need to give Jiang Cheng some happiness. Thank you all.

Please check out my other works, if you have the time and space for it. Everything I write is Jiang Cheng friendly because I love him and I just want him to be happy, and I will definitely drag everyone else along as well.

End Notes

Comments are welcome, but not criticisms or character bashing. If you disagree with my portrayal of a character feel free to keep it to yourself. This is a fanfiction and characters may be OOC and that is a deliberate choice.

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